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A MAGAZINE OF LETTERS

Founded in 1889 by CHARLOTTE PORTER *and* HELEN A. CLARKE

JOHN HEARD, *Editor*

EDMUND R. BROWN, *Managing Editor*

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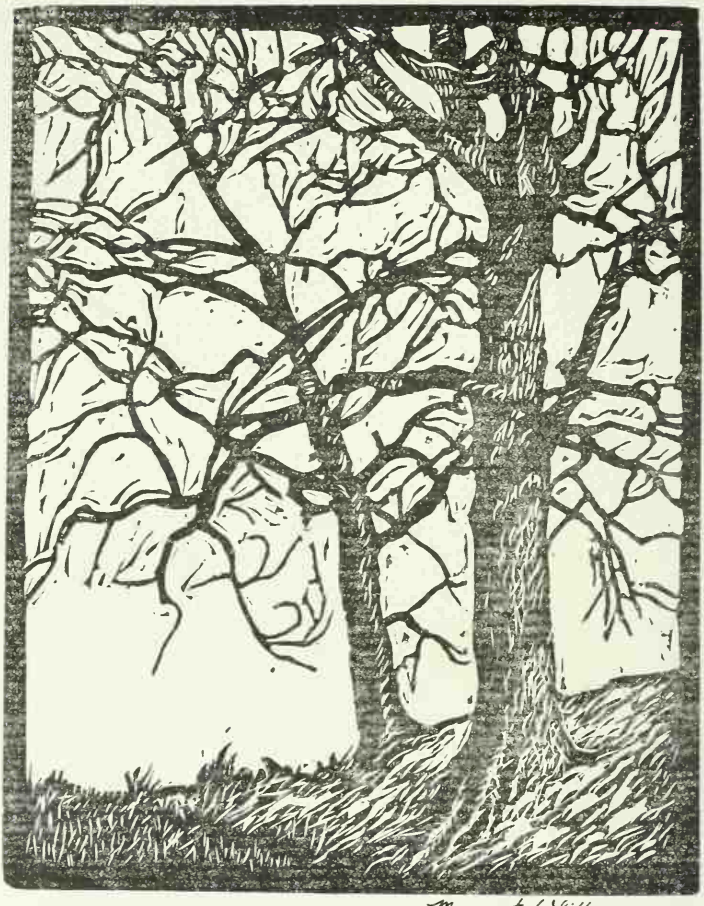

"BARE BOUGHS"

TO DAMASCUS

A DREAM TRILOGY

PART III*

By August Strindberg

Authorized translation by Sam E. Davidson

THE CHARACTERS

The Stranger
The Lady
The Confessor
The Magistrate
The Prior
The Tempter
The First Wife
The Daughter

Minor Characters

THE SETTINGS

ACT I.
The Shore of the River

ACT II.
A Cross-Road in the Mountains

ACT III.

A Terrace
A Cliff-Landscape
A Little House
} *in the mountain on which the cloister is situated*

ACT IV.

The Chapter-Room
The Picture-Gallery
The Chapel
} *of the Cloister*

*PART I appeared in *Poet Lore*, Volume XLII, Number 1; and PART II in *Poet Lore*, Volume XLII, Number 2. Copyright, 1935, by Bruce Humphries, Inc. All rights reserved.

ACT I

The Shore of the River

The foreground forms the shore of a great river. To the right, a stretch of land, covered with old willow-trees.

The midground contains the river, which flows along silently.

The background forms the other shore, which is a high, forest overgrown mountain. The cloister is visible over the tops of the trees: it is a colossal four-cornered building, entirely white, with two rows of little windows; the facade is interrupted by the two-towered chapel of the cloister, in Jesuit-style. The door of the chapel is open, and at certain moments, the pyx on the altar is visible in the sunshine.

On the shore of the foreground, which is low and sandy, grow king's tapers (candles) and lisimachia; a flat boat lies at the shore. To the left, the hut of the ferryman.

It is an early summer evening and the sun is sinking; the foreground, the river, and the nearest portions of the background lie in shadows; the foliage of the forest trees on the other shore stirs itself in the soft wind; the cloister alone is illuminated by the sun.

THE STRANGER *and* THE CONFESSOR *enter from the right.* THE STRANGER *is in Alpine-costume: a brown cloak with pelerine and hood; staff and knapsack; he limps somewhat.* THE CONFESSOR *is in the black-and-white dress of the Dominicans. They remain standing in such a position that one of the willows conceals the view of the cloister from them.*

THE STRANGER. Why do you drag me through such broken, hilly country; we will never reach our destination.

THE CONFESSOR. There is no other way, my friend! We are almost there now. (*He leads* THE STRANGER *further on to the stage.* THE STRANGER *catches sight of the cloister and is enchanted by the prospect; he raises his hat and puts down knapsack and staff.*)

THE CONFESSOR. Well?

THE STRANGER. I have never seen anything so white before on this dirty earth, except perhaps in a dream! Yes, I remember now; in my youth, I dreamt of such a house, in which peace and purity resided!—Be blessed, white house—at last, I feel at home!

THE CONFESSOR. Good! But first we must wait on this shore for the pilgrims—this shore, which is called the shore of departure, because here one says goodbye to the world before being taken across by the ferryman.

THE STRANGER. Haven't I made enough departures already? Wasn't my whole life a thorny path of leavetakings? Post-offices, steamer-bridges, railroad-stations—and always with the waving of the tear-soaked handkerchief!

THE CONFESSOR. And yet your voice trembles with the pain of regret!

THE STRANGER. I regret nothing, and I want to recall nothing!

THE CONFESSOR. Not even your youth?

THE STRANGER. That, least of all! What would I do with it? Suffer?

THE CONFESSOR. Or enjoy?

THE STRANGER. I never enjoyed anything! I was born with a thorn in the flesh, and every time I stretched out my hand for pleasure, I pricked my own finger, while Satan gave me a slap on the cheek!

THE CONFESSOR. Poor pleasures!

THE STRANGER. Not so bad! Home-life, wife, children, obligations, worries for others!—No, I was born in disgrace, a step-child of life, hunted down, pursued—in a word, cursed.

THE CONFESSOR. Because you did not heed the command of God . . .

THE STRANGER. Nobody can heed it, at least according to what Paul maintained. But what nobody else can do, I will do. Why I, alone? Because I am the scape-goat; because more is demanded of me than of others; (*he shrieks*) because I have been unjustly treated!

THE CONFESSOR. Are you back on that theme, you rebel?

THE STRANGER. Yes, I am—back again—always back! Let us cross the river.

THE CONFESSOR. Do you imagine that we can ascend to the white house unprepared?

THE STRANGER. I'm ready: test me!

THE CONFESSOR. Good; the first vow of the cloister is known as humility!

THE STRANGER. And the second is known as obedience! Neither of the two has been my special virtue; that is why I want to test my strength!

THE CONFESSOR. And show how arrogant you are in humility?

THE STRANGER. Whatever it is, it's all the same to me.

THE CONFESSOR. All? The world and its best gifts: the

joy of innocent children, the pleasant warmth of the hearth, recognition by fellow creatures, satisfaction at the fulfillment of an obligation—is everything the same?

THE STRANGER. To me, yes! Because I was born without the capacity for happiness. There have been times when I have been envied, and yet I have never been able to understand what it was that I had that was worth envying: the torments of my afflictions, the disquietude which resulted, which no one else would endure for long?

THE CONFESSOR. It is true! Life has given you everything you wanted, even gold. And if I remember rightly even a statue was made of you?

THE STRANGER. Yes, even a statue!

THE CONFESSOR. Do you believe in such things?

THE STRANGER. No, I don't! In any case, a monument expresses a well-founded recognition, which cannot be affected by either envy or imprudence.

THE CONFESSOR. Do you really mean that? On the contrary, I have noticed that the greatness of men is dependent upon the opinions of others, and when those opinions alter, the great quickly take a fall and become less than nothing.

THE STRANGER. The opinions of others have never counted when I formed my own opinions!

THE CONFESSOR. So? Well!

THE STRANGER. And no one has ever been so severe with himself as I have! And no one so humble! All have claimed respect of me, while they stepped on me and spat at me. When I finally discovered that I had obligations to the immortal soul which I had been given to preserve, I began to demand respect for that soul. And, then, I was branded as the proudest of the proud! And by whom? By the humblest of the humble!

THE CONFESSOR. You entangle yourself somewhat in contradictions.

THE STRANGER. Yes, I do, because all of life is made up of nothing but contradictions: the rich are the spiritually poor; the weak and poor majority possess the most power, and the most powerful serve the weakest; I have never met any one so proud as the humble; I have never found an uncultured person who did not believe himself capable of passing judgment upon culture and dispensing with it; I have always found the most disagreeable of the sins among the holiest—I mean that of self-satisfaction. I myself was holy in my youth, but later I became very wicked!

And the better I became in my own estimation, the worse I became in actuality!

THE CONFESSOR. Then what are you looking for here?

THE STRANGER. What I have just said; but I will add to it: I am looking for death, without dying!

THE CONFESSOR. The death of your flesh, the death of your ego! Good! Now be quiet for a while! The pilgrims are coming on their rafts, to celebrate the Corpus Christi . . .

THE STRANGER (*looks to the right; is startled*). What is it?

THE CONFESSOR. Those are people who believe . . .

THE STRANGER. Then help me to believe!

(*The sun falls on the pyx in the chapel above; it sparkles like a pane of glass at sunset.*)

THE STRANGER. Has the sun gone into the chapel or . . .

THE CONFESSOR. The sun has gone into the chapel!

(*The first raft comes from the right. Children, dressed in white, with garlands on their heads and burning candles in their hands, stand around an altar covered with flowers; a white flag with a gold lily is set upon the altar. They sing while the raft glides slowly by:*

Beati omnes qui timent Dominum,
Happy is everyone that feareth the Lord,
Qui ambulant in viis ejus,
That walketh in his ways,
Labores manum tuarum quia manducabis;
When thou eatest of the labor of thy hands,
Beatus es et bene tibi erit.
Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.

The second raft, with young boys on the one side, and young girls on the other. A flag with a rose.

Uxor tua sicut vitis abundans;
Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine,
In lateribus domus tuae.
In the innermost parts of thy house.

The third raft with men and women; a flag with various fruits: figs, grapes, pomegranates, melons, ears of corn, etc.

Filii tui sicut novellae olivarum,
Thy children like olive plants,
In circuitu mensae tuae.
Round about thy table.

The fourth raft, with old men and women; a flag with a snow-covered pine-tree.

Ecce sic benedicetur homo,
Behold, surely thus shall the man be blessed,
Qui timet Dominum!
That feareth the Lord.

The rafts float away.)

THE STRANGER. What were they singing?

THE CONFESSOR. That was a song for the pilgrimage!

THE STRANGER. Who wrote it?

THE CONFESSOR. A kingly man . . .

THE STRANGER. Here? What is his name, and has he written anything else?

THE CONFESSOR. He has written at least fifty songs, and his name is David, son of Isaac. But he did not write psalms always . . . when he was young he did other things! Yes, yes, that is the way things go!

THE STRANGER. Can we go now?

THE CONFESSOR. Soon, but first I want to ask you something!

THE STRANGER. Go ahead!

THE CONFESSOR. But you mustn't become sad or ill-tempered!

THE STRANGER. Of course not!

THE CONFESSOR. You see, here, on this side of the river, you are a well-known—let us say, a famous man; but over there, on the other side, you will be an utter stranger to the Brothers—nothing more than an ordinary, simple man.

THE STRANGER. So! Don't they read over there, in the cloister?

THE CONFESSOR. Not nonsense—only serious books!

THE STRANGER. But they take the newspapers, don't they?

THE CONFESSOR. Not the ones that write about you!

THE STRANGER. Then, on the other side of the river, the work of my life does not exist?

THE CONFESSOR. What work?

THE STRANGER. Ah, yes! Good!—Now can we go?

THE CONFESSOR. Soon! Is there no one to whom you would like to say goodbye?

THE STRANGER (*after a pause*). There is, but that lies outside the limits of possibility.

THE CONFESSOR. Is there anything that is impossible?

THE STRANGER. I should judge not, after having seen my own fate!

THE CONFESSOR. Then, whom would you like to see again?

THE STRANGER. Once I had a daughter; I called her Sylvia, because she sang like a thrush all day long. It has been several years since I saw her last, and she must be sixteen by now. But I'm afraid that if I see her, life will be worthwhile to me again.

THE CONFESSOR. You are afraid of nothing else?

THE STRANGER. What else is there to be afraid of?

THE CONFESSOR. That she might have changed!

THE STRANGER. If she has, it will be for the better!

THE CONFESSOR. You are sure of that?

THE STRANGER. Yes!

THE CONFESSOR. Then, she will come! (*He goes down to the shore and waves to the right.*)

THE STRANGER. Wait! . . . I am wondering whether it would be wise, after all.

THE CONFESSOR. No harm can come of it! (*He waves again.*)

(*Out of the river appears a boat, rowed by a young maiden. She is dressed in summer clothes, her head is bare and her blond hair hangs loose. Behind the willow, she climbs out of the boat.*

THE CONFESSOR *draws back to the hut of the ferryman, but remains visible to the spectators.* THE STRANGER *has waved to the girl, who has replied to his greeting.*)

THE GIRL (*comes on to the stage and rushes into the arms of* THE STRANGER, *kissing him*). Papa! Dear papa!

THE STRANGER. Sylvia, my beloved child!

THE GIRL. How in the wide world did you get way up here in the mountains?

THE STRANGER. And you, how did you get here? I imagined that I had concealed myself pretty well!

THE GIRL. But why did you want to conceal yourself?

THE STRANGER. Ask as few questions as possible! . . . You have become a big girl—And I have become gray!

THE GIRL. No, you are not gray . . . You are just as young as when we separated . . .

THE STRANGER. When we separated . . .

THE GIRL. When you went away from us . . .

(THE STRANGER *is silent.*)

THE GIRL. Aren't you glad to see me again?

THE STRANGER (*dully*). Yes!

THE GIRL. Then why don't you show it?

THE STRANGER. How can I enjoy myself when I realize that this is the last time I shall ever see you!

THE GIRL. But where are you going?

THE STRANGER (*points to the cloister*). Up there?

THE GIRL (*knowingly*). To the cloister? . . . Yes, perhaps, after all, that *is* best.

THE STRANGER. You think so?

THE GIRL (*gently, with suffering in her voice*). I think if a man has made a failure of his life . . . (*caressingly*) Now, you are growing sad! Tell me . . .

THE STRANGER. You tell me, beloved child, about that which troubles me more than anything else . . . You have a step-father now . . .

THE GIRL. Yes!

THE STRANGER. Well?

THE GIRL. He is a very good man . . .

THE STRANGER. Who has all the virtues which I lack—

THE GIRL. Aren't you glad that we're in better hands now?

THE STRANGER. Good, better, best . . . Why did you come bareheaded?

THE GIRL. George is carrying my hat.

THE STRANGER. Who is George, and where is he?

THE GIRL. George is my friend, and he is waiting down there below, at the shore.

THE STRANGER. Are you engaged?

THE GIRL. No, of course not!

THE STRANGER. Do you intend to marry?

THE GIRL. Never!

THE STRANGER. I see it on your marble cheeks, like the cheeks of a child who has arisen too early; I hear it in your voice, no longer like the voice of the thrush, but like a hoarse shrieking parrot; I feel it in your kisses which burn coldly like the sun in May; your hard, fixed looks tell me that you are harboring a secret which you are ashamed of, and yet which you like to boast of . . . And the other brothers and sisters?

THE GIRL. They are all well, thank you!

THE STRANGER. Is there anything else to talk about?

THE GIRL (*coldly*). Perhaps not! . . .

THE STRANGER. Now you are just like your mother!

THE GIRL. How can you say that, when you never knew her as she really was?

THE STRANGER. Young as you are, you understand that, do you?

THE GIRL. I learned to understand from you! If only you yourself understood!

THE STRANGER. Have you anything else to teach me?

THE GIRL. Perhaps! But it would not be appropriate at your age.

THE STRANGER. My day has been and is past; just as Sylvia is gone, merely a name, a memory. (*He takes a guide-book out of his pocket.*) Do you see this guide-book! Do you see the marks of little fingers there, and there, of moist little lips? These you made when you were five years old and sat rocking on my knee, when we saw the Alps for the first time. You imagined it to be heaven, but when I explained to you that it was only the Jungfrau, you asked whether the name was in the book so that you might kiss it.

THE GIRL. I don't remember anything about that!

THE STRANGER. The pleasantest memories fade away; the ugliest endure. Do you remember anything about me?

THE GIRL. Of course!

THE STRANGER. Hush! I know what you're thinking of! One night—oh, a horrible night! Sylvia, child, if I close my eyes, I see a pale little angel sleeping in my arms because it is sick, thanking me when it receives presents . . . where is she, oh, where is she? I long for her and she is no more, even though she is not dead . . . You, as you stand there, are like some stranger that I have never met and that I would not care to see again. If Sylvia were dead and lay in her grave, then I could bring flowers to put on it . . . how strange! She is not in the kingdom of the dead, and yet she is not here on earth! Perhaps she has never been here! Perhaps she was only a dream like all the others!

THE GIRL (*caressingly*). Dear papa!

THE STRANGER. No, it was only her voice . . . You think my life was a failure?

THE GIRL. Yes! But why speak about it now . . .

THE STRANGER. Because I recall now that I once saved *your* life. You lay in a fever for a whole month and suffered intensely; your mother, who was always a sensible woman,

asked the doctor for a strong poison, with which to relieve you of the anguish of living. But I stopped them and saved you from death, and your mother from prison!

THE GIRL. I don't believe it!

THE STRANGER. And yet it might be true, even if you don't believe it!

THE GIRL. You dreamt it!

THE STRANGER. Who knows if I haven't dreamt *everything;* perhaps, even now, I am standing here and dreaming! Oh, if it were only so!

THE GIRL. I must go now, dear papa!

THE STRANGER. Goodbye, then!

THE GIRL. May I never write to you?

THE STRANGER. A dead one write to a dead one? Letters will not reach me any more! And visitors I will not be allowed to receive. But I am glad that we have seen each other, because now there is nothing left to hold me to the earth. (*He goes to the left.*) Goodbye, mademoiselle, or madame, as I should now say! . . . Tears are not necessary!

THE GIRL. I wasn't thinking of that, although I think the situation requires something. Goodbye, then! (*She goes to the right.*)

THE STRANGER (*to* THE CONFESSOR). You see, Confessor! no harm has come from the meeting. To separate, mutually satisfied, is a blessing from heaven. Humanity progresses with great strides, self-restraint growing in proportion to the diminution of the flow of tears. I have seen so many tears in my lifetime, that I was almost dumbfounded by this self-possession. That was a strong child, just as I would have wished her to be! . . . And that was the most beautiful thing that life could offer! The child, the angel in the white veil of the cradle; and there was a blue coverlet over it and it slept; blue and arched like the heavens . . . that was the best! How will the worst appear?

THE CONFESSOR. You must be calm and not excite yourself! First, throw away that silly guide-book! This will be your last journey.

THE STRANGER You mean this here? . . . Good! (*He opens the book, kisses it, and throws it into the river.*) What else?

THE CONFESSOR. If you have any gold or silver in your pocket, you must give it to the poor.

THE STRANGER. I have a silver watch! I never had a gold one.

THE CONFESSOR. Give it to the ferryman, and he will give you a glass of wine in return!

THE STRANGER. The last glass! That's like an execution! Perhaps they will cut off my hair, too?

THE CONFESSOR. Yes, later! (*He takes the watch and passes it into the hut of the ferryman, whispering a few words through the door; he receives a flask of wine and a glass which he places on the table.*)

THE STRANGER (*fills his glass, but lets it stand*). Will they never give me any wine up there?

THE CONFESSOR. Never, and you will never see women either! You may hear songs, but not the sort that usually accompany wine and women.

THE STRANGER. I have had enough of women; they no longer hold any temptation for me.

THE CONFESSOR. You are sure of that?

THE STRANGER. Entirely sure? No! . . . But tell me: What do you think about women? Have they never set foot within your sacred walls?

THE CONFESSOR. You still like to ask questions?

THE STRANGER. And why shouldn't an abbess take confession, read a mass, or preach a sermon?

THE CONFESSOR. I do not answer such questions!

THE STRANGER. Because your answers would coincide with my thoughts in the matter.

THE CONFESSOR. It would be little short of a miracle, if we were to agree on a single point!

THE STRANGER. Very good!

THE CONFESSOR. Drink up your wine now!

THE STRANGER. No, I only want to look at it for the last time. It is beautiful . . .

THE CONFESSOR. Don't lose yourself in reflection; memories lie on the ground!

THE STRANGER. And forgotten things, and songs, and power—imaginary power, and yet, on that account, all the more mighty . . .

THE CONFESSOR. Wait here a moment! I'm going to arrange for the ferry!

THE STRANGER. Sh! I hear a song, and I see! I see it . . . I have seen a moment which unfurls itself like a flag

in a gust of wind, only to droop immediately afterward like a rag on a mop; we see no further, then, than a rag. I have seen the whole of life in a second, with all its joys and sorrows, its beauty and its wretchedness, but now I see nothing!

THE CONFESSOR (*goes to the left*). Wait here a moment! I'm going to arrange for the ferry!

(THE STRANGER *goes upstage so far that the rays of the setting sun, which fall from the right, through the trees, throw his shadow over the shore and the river.*)

(THE LADY *in deep mourning, enters from the right; her shadow gradually merges with that of* THE STRANGER.)

THE STRANGER (*who, at first, considers his shadow alone*). Ha! The sun! Which creates a bloodless image out of me, a giant, which crosses the river, climbs up the mountain, mounts high over the roofs of the cloister-chapel and—now moves out into space—to the stars—ha, now I am high up among the stars . . . (*He notices the shadow of* THE LADY.) But who follows me, who interrupts my ascension into the heavens and tries to climb my shoulders? (*He turns around.*)—You!

THE LADY. I!

THE STRANGER. So black! So black and so wicked!

THE LADY. Not wicked any more! In mourning . . .

THE STRANGER. For whom do you mourn?

THE LADY. Our Mitzi . . .

THE STRANGER. My daughter!

(THE LADY *spreads out her arms, as if to throw herself upon his breast, but he turns aside.*)

THE STRANGER. I congratulate the dead baby; I grieve for you, but I myself am beyond the pale!

THE LADY. Console me, too!

THE STRANGER. How fitting! That I should console my Fury, weep with my gaoler, play before my tormentor!

THE LADY. Have you no feelings at all, then?

THE STRANGER. None at all! The feeling that I did have, I wasted on you and the others.

THE LADY. That's right! Blame me!

THE STRANGER. No! That I won't do, because I have neither the time nor the inclination! Where do you want to go?

THE LADY. I want to go across on the ferry.

THE STRANGER. How annoying; I'm going the same way.

(THE LADY *weeps in her handkerchief.*)

THE STRANGER (*takes the handkerchief and dries her tears*).

Dry your tears, child, and be yourself! Be hard, be unfeeling, as you are in reality!

(THE LADY *wants to put her arms around his neck.*)

THE STRANGER (*discourages her, by striking her fingers gently*). Don't touch me! When your words and your looks were not powerful enough, you always had to touch! You will excuse a somewhat commonplace question: Are you hungry?

THE LADY. No, thanks!

THE STRANGER. You are tired: sit down!

(THE LADY *seats herself at the table.*)

THE STRANGER (*throws the flask and the glass into the river*). Well, what will you live for now?

THE LADY (*sadly*). I don't know!

THE STRANGER. Where do you intend going?

THE LADY (*sobbing*). I don't know!

THE STRANGER. You despair entirely? You see no reason for existing and no end to your misery! What a pity that there is no cloister for both sexes; then we would both be a pair!—Is the werewolf still alive?

THE LADY. You mean . . .

THE STRANGER. Your first husband!

THE LADY. He will never die.

THE STRANGER. Like a certain species of worm!—Now that we are far removed from the world and its narrow point of view, tell me: Why did you desert him that time to go with me?

THE LADY. Because I loved you!

THE STRANGER. How long did that last?

THE LADY. Until I read your book, and until the child came.

THE STRANGER. And then?

THE LADY. Then I hated you! All the evil that I derived from you, I tried to free myself of, but could not!

THE STRANGER. That is your interpretation of the matter, but what it was in reality no one will ever know!

THE LADY. Have you ever noticed that one rarely learns the truth about anything? That one can live with other persons for twenty years, with his brothers and sisters and his parents, for example, and never know anything about them?

THE STRANGER. So, you've noticed that, too! If you have observed so well, tell me: How did you come to love me?

THE LADY. That I don't know, but I'll try to remember. (*Pause.*) Yes, you had the manly courage to be impolite to a

woman! You wanted the company of a human being and not of a woman, in me! That pleased me, and you, I found!

THE STRANGER. Then perhaps you can tell me whether you took me for a misogynist, as well?

THE LADY. Woman-hater, to be plain! Every healthy man is that at heart, and all men who worship women are not normal!

THE STRANGER. You're not complimenting me, are you?

THE LADY. The woman who compliments her husband is not sound.

THE STRANGER. You have been thinking a good deal, I see!

THE LADY. That is the least that I have done, and when I have not thought, I have understood most . . . moreover, what I have just said is for the most part improvised, as you would call it, and does not have to be the absolute truth.

THE STRANGER. If it agrees with my many observations, it undoubtedly becomes the truth for me!

(THE LADY *weeps in her handkerchief.*)

THE STRANGER. You are crying again now!

THE LADY. I am thinking about Mitzi—the most beautiful thing is gone!

THE STRANGER. No, you were the most beautiful, when you sat up the whole night and watched your baby as it lay ill in bed, because the cradle was too cold!

(*The door of the ferryman's hut is struck sharply three times.*)

THE STRANGER. Quiet!

THE LADY. What is that?

THE STRANGER. My escort, who is waiting for me.

THE LADY (*resumes*). I would not have believed that life could have given me anything quite so lovely as a child!

THE STRANGER. And at the same time something quite so bitter.

THE LADY. Why bitter?

THE STRANGER. You yourself were once a child, and do you recall how, just after we married, we arrived at your mother's house, in tatters, dirty, and without money? I remember that she did not find us quite so lovely!

THE LADY. That's true!

THE STRANGER. And I—yes, I just saw my Sylvia! I expected that all the virtues and beauties which she displayed, as a child, would have blossomed out in the young woman . . .

THE LADY. And?

THE STRANGER. I found a faded rose, which had bloomed

too early . . . her breasts had fallen, her hair was unkempt like that of a neglected child, and her teeth were decayed . .

THE LADY. How horrible!

THE STRANGER. Don't grieve! Don't mourn for the little one—for Mitzi—It is far more appropriate to mourn for the grown one which the little one never comes to be!

THE LADY. Such is life!

THE STRANGER. Yes, such is life! And that's why I'm going to bury myself alive!

THE LADY. Where?

THE STRANGER (*points to the cloister*). Up there!

THE LADY. In the cloister! . . . No, don't go away from me. Keep me company; I'm so alone in the world and so poor—so poor! When the baby died, my mother put me out of the house, and since then, I have lived in a garret, together with a seamstress. At first, she was well-behaved and sympathetic; but she soon became lonely in the long evenings—and she went out to look for company—and so we separated. Now I stand here on the road and possess nothing more than the clothes I am wearing: nothing more than my grief, which I eat and drink, which nourishes me, which puts me to sleep, which I would exchange for nothing else in all the world!

(THE STRANGER *weeps*.)

THE LADY. You're crying—Let me kiss your eyes.

THE STRANGER. You've suffered on my account!

THE LADY. Certainly not on your account! And you have never done me any harm; it is I who have driven you away from house and hearth and child!

THE STRANGER. I don't recall that, but if you say it . . . then, do you still love me?

THE LADY. Possibly! I don't know!

THE STRANGER. Perhaps we could begin again?

THE LADY. Begin again? The same struggle? No, we don't want to do that!

THE STRANGER. You're right. The struggle would begin all over again! And yet, it's so hard to leave you!

THE LADY. Leave? That word alone is terrible enough!

THE STRANGER. What shall we do then?

THE LADY. I don't know!

THE STRANGER. No, we know nothing, and not even that; that much, you see, I have come to believe!

THE LADY. How do you know that you can believe, when belief is a gift?

THE STRANGER. One can obtain a present if he begs for it.

THE LADY. Oh, if one could beg—but I have never been able to beg . . .

THE STRANGER. *I* have had to learn to—why can't you?

THE LADY. First you must humble yourself . . .

THE STRANGER. Life takes care of that . . .

THE LADY. Mitzi, Mitzi, Mitzi . . . (*She has rolled together a shawl, which she carried on her arm, and laid it like a muffled-up child on her knees.*) Sleep, sleep, sleep! . . . Do you know, I can see her . . . See, here! She smiles at me; but she is dressed in black; she is in mourning, too! How stupid I am! Because her mother is in mourning . . . and she has two lower teeth, and they are so white . . . milk-teeth—she will never have any others . . . no, but can't you see her where I see her? It's no apparition; it's she . . .

THE CONFESSOR (*from the door of the hut; roughly to* THE STRANGER). Come! Everything is ready!

THE STRANGER. No, not yet; first I must put my house in order, and finish my business with this woman who was once my wife.

THE CONFESSOR. Then you want to remain here?

THE STRANGER. No, but I don't want to leave any unfulfilled obligations behind! This woman stands on the road, deserted, without a home, without money!

THE CONFESSOR. What concern is that of ours? Let the dead bury their dead!

THE STRANGER. Are those your teachings?

THE CONFESSOR. No, yours! . . . mine, on the contrary, bid me send a sister of charity to take care of this unfortunate woman who . . . who . . and the sister will soon be here!

THE STRANGER. I depend on that!

THE CONFESSOR (*takes* THE STRANGER *by the hand and leads him away*). Then come!

THE STRANGER (*despairing*). Jesus Christ, help us all!

THE CONFESSOR. Amen!

(THE LADY *has not been watching the movements of* THE CONFESSOR *and* THE STRANGER*; now she looks up and sees* THE STRANGER *leaving; she makes a movement, as if to spring up and hold him back, but is hindered by the imaginary child, which she has laid on her breast.*)

ACT II

A Cross-Road in the Mountains

(*A cross-road high in the mountains. To the right, huts. To the left, a pond, around which sit sick people, dressed in blue, and with hands of cinnabar-red.*

Out of the pond rise blue fumes and little blue flames now and then. At such times, the sick ones cover their mouths with their hands and cough.

A mountain forms the background—a mountain covered with pine-forests, and cut off above by a grey motionless fog.

THE STRANGER *sits at a table in front of a hut.* THE CONFESSOR *comes to the right, out of the background.*)

THE STRANGER. At last!

THE CONFESSOR. What do you mean, at last?

THE STRANGER. Eight days ago you left me here and told me to wait until you returned.

THE CONFESSOR. I told you, didn't I, that the road to the white house up there would be long and hard?

THE STRANGER. I don't deny that! How far have we come already?

THE CONFESSOR. Five hundred meters! We still have fifteen hundred to go!

THE STRANGER. But where is the sun?

THE CONFESSOR. Up there, above the clouds . . .

THE STRANGER. Then, we must go through the clouds, too?

THE CONFESSOR. To be sure!

THE STRANGER. But these sick people? What kind of people are they? And why these red hands?

THE CONFESSOR. Rather than cast aspersions on either of us, I will describe the matter figuratively. You, as a poet, will have no difficulty in understanding me.

THE STRANGER. Yes, say something pretty; there's so much that's ugly here!

THE CONFESSOR. You have probably noticed that the signs of the planets correspond to the signs of certain metals? Good! Then, you know, no doubt, that Venus is indicated by a mirror. In primitive times, this mirror was made of copper, and this metal was called Venus and bore her sign. But now the back of the Venus-mirror is coated with quicksilver or mercury!

THE STRANGER. The back of Venus is mercury!—Ugh!

THE CONFESSOR. But the back of Venus is also quicksilver,

which, in itself, is as clear and reflecting as a calm sea or a lake in high summer. If the mercury comes in contact with flint and is fired, it becomes as red as freshdrawn blood, as the cloth of the scaffold, as the lips of a harlot, the painted lips of a harlot, the cinnabar-painted lips of a harlot! Do you understand now, or not?

THE STRANGER. Wait a moment! Cinnabar is quicksilver and sulphur . . .

THE CONFESSOR. There you have it! Mercury must be fired when it comes too close to Venus!—now have we talked enough about this?

THE STRANGER. Are these sulphur springs?

THE CONFESSOR. Yes! And the sulphur flames cleanse or consume everything that is rotten! That is why people are sent to the sulphur springs, when the spring of life has begun to decay.

THE STRANGER. And how does the spring of life decay?

THE CONFESSOR. When Aphrodite, sprung from the pure womb of the sea, wallows in the earth! . . . When Aphrodite Urania, the celestial, degrades herself like Pandemos, the Venus-of-the-streets.

THE STRANGER. Why is desire born?

THE CONFESSOR. Pure desire, in order to be gratified; impure, in order to be suppressed.

THE STRANGER. What is pure and what is impure?

THE CONFESSOR. Are you beginning that again?

THE STRANGER. Ask these people here . . .

THE CONFESSOR. Take care! (*He fixes his eyes upon* THE STRANGER, *who cringes.*)

THE STRANGER. You're suffocating me . . . my breast! . . .

THE CONFESSOR. Yes, I want to deprive you of the air which you employ for meaningless words and unnecessary questions . . . Sit down there! I'll be back—when you have learned patience and undergone the test! But don't forget that I can hear and see and sense everything that you do, no matter where I am!

THE STRANGER. Then, this is a test! It's good to know that!

THE CONFESSOR. But you may not speak with the worshippers of Venus.

(THE OLD MAJA* *appears in the background.*)

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*No English equivalent is available for the Swedish "Maja."—*The Translator.*

THE STRANGER (*rises, despairing*). Whom do I meet here at last! Whom . . .

THE CONFESSOR . . . of whom are you speaking?

THE STRANGER. Of that woman over there. The old woman!

THE CONFESSOR. Who is she?

THE STRANGER (*calls out*). Maja! Listen to me!

(THE OLD MAJA *disappears*).

THE STRANGER (*hastens after her*). Maja, my friend, listen to me! . . . (*She has disappeared.*)

THE CONFESSOR. Who was that?

THE STRANGER (*sits down*). Oh, God! . . . When I finally find her again, she disappears or . . . I have been looking for her for seven long years; I advertised, I wrote letters.

THE CONFESSOR. Why?

THE STRANGER. Because her fate is wrapped up with mine! Maja was the nurse of my first child . . . that was in the most difficult years . . . then I fought invisible ones because they did not bless my work! I wrote so much that my brains and nerves must have dissolved like fat in alcohol . . . but what I did was unavailing; I belong to that group of people for which there is no success . . . a day came when I could not pay the servants their wages—it was terrible—I became the servant of my servant-girls, and they became my master! Finally . . . yes, in order to save my soul at least, I escaped from this overpowering fate . . . out into the wastes, I went. I gathered together the remains of my spirit and soared on high again!—my first concern, naturally, was my debts! For seven long years I looked for Maja, but in vain! For seven long years, I saw her shadow from the windows of trains, from the decks of steamers, in foreign cities, in faraway lands, without ever being able to find her. For seven years I dreamt about her; for seven years, I have been ashamed of myself, and if I drank a glass of wine, I blushed in shame at the thought of the old Maja, who perhaps drank water in some poorhouse! I tried to send the amount which I owed to the poor, but it didn't help! And now—I have found her again and lost her, in the same moment. (*He rises and goes searching into the background.*) Explain this to me! I want to pay what I owe; I can, at last, pay, but may not!

THE CONFESSOR. Nonsense! Kneel before this mystery and you will find that the explanation comes later—Goodbye! (*He goes.*)

THE STRANGER. Later—Everything comes later!
THE CONFESSOR. That doesn't come now! (*He goes.*)

(THE LADY *enters, thoughtfully, seats herself at the table opposite* THE STRANGER.)

THE STRANGER Are you here again! . . . The same and yet not the same . . . How lovely you have become; as lovely as the first time that I saw you and asked you if I could be your friend, your dog . . .

THE LADY. That you can see a beauty in me which, in reality, I don't possess, is only an indication that once again you have the mirror of beauty in your eyes . . . The werewolf was never able to see anything beautiful in me, because he never possessed the faculty for perceiving beauty.

THE STRANGER. But why did you kiss me that time—why did you have to do that?

THE LADY. I have often asked myself why I did it, but have never been able to answer! Now when I was far away from you—and came up here in the mountains, where the air is purer—and the sun nearer—Sh! Now I see that Sunday afternoon when you, like a helpless, cast-out child, with hurt eyes, sat there and stared at your fate—the motherly feeling, which had never been allowed to develop itself in me, suddenly welled up—and pity, pity for a fellow-being enveloped me—so that I forgot myself . . .

THE STRANGER. I am ashamed of myself!—Now that I feel what you say is true . . .

THE LADY. Then you interpreted my actions in some other way! If . . .

THE STRANGER. No, don't say it! I'm thoroughly ashamed of myself!

THE LADY. So poorly you thought of me. Didn't you notice that I had lowered a veil between the two of us, the sword of the knight in the bridal bed . . .

THE STRANGER. I am ashamed of myself . . . My evil thoughts were transferred to you! Ingeborg, you were made out of better stuff than I . . . I am ashamed of myself!

THE LADY. No, you are beautiful! And how beautiful!

THE STRANGER. Oh, no! Not I! You!

THE LADY (*ecstatically*) You! . . . Oh, now I have seen behind the mask and false beard . . . now I see . . . now I see what you have always concealed . . . what I had hoped that I would find in you . . what I sought for,

sought for . . Many a time I believed that you were a hypocrite; but we are not hypocrites, no, no, no, we could never deceive one another . . .

THE STRANGER. Ingeborg . . . now, on the other side of the river, where we will leave behind us the life we lived together, how different everything seems . . . now, now I see your soul, the ideal, the angel, which, because of sin, was thrown into the prison of the flesh . . . there is an upper side and a time before . . . it was not the beginning when we began, and it will not be the end when we finish. It is but a fragment of life, without beginning, without end! And that's why it's so hard to comprehend it!

THE LADY (*tenderly*). So hard, so hard! . . . tell me—now that we are on the other side of guilt or without guilt—how did you ever come to hate women?

THE STRANGER. Let me think!—To hate women?—Hate? . . . Why, I've never done that! On the contrary! Ever since I can remember, I have always worshipped some one—for the most part, some innocent woman; and I have loved three times like a volcanic mountain . . . yet, wait! I have always felt that the women hated me . . . and they have always tortured me!

THE LADY. How strange!

THE STRANGER. Let me think a little more . . . Perhaps I have been jealous of my individuality . . . have been afraid of being influenced . . . my first love was for a governess and nurse . . . moreover, there are men who cannot endure children, and men who cannot endure women—dominating them, that is to say.

THE LADY (*kindly*). But you have called women the enemies of mankind. Did you mean that?

THE STRANGER. Certainly I meant that, or I wouldn't have written it! And what is more, I have written from experience, and not mere theories . . . I sought for an angel in the woman, who would lend me its wings, and instead, I fell into the hands of an earth-spirit who smothered me under the bed, which he had filled with pin-feathers—I looked for an Ariel and I found a Caliban—If I wanted to soar on high, she dragged me down—and . . .

THE LADY (*gently*). Do you know what that great student of women, Solomon, said?—" . . . And I found more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and

her hands as bands; who so pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her."

THE STRANGER. And I was never pleasing in the eyes of God! A punishment, then? That sounds better, the way you put it . . . but I was never pleasing in anyone's eyes, and I never heard a good word spoken of me! Have I never done anything good? Is it possible that any person could never have done any good?—It's terrible never to have heard a good word!

THE LADY. But you've heard many; but if anyone has said something good of you, you have declined it, as if you were suffering under it!

THE STRANGER. You're right; now I remember! But can you explain that?

THE LADY. Explain? You're always demanding an explanation for the unexplainable. "I gave my heart to know wisdom . . . and I saw that, of all the works of God, a man was least able to understand what happened under the sun. No matter how strenuously the man works, no matter how deeply he explores, he still cannot comprehend; and even if the wise man says that he understands the things that happen under the sun, he is unable, nevertheless, to comprehend their significance."

THE STRANGER. Who said that?

THE LADY. The preacher!—(*She takes a doll out of her pocket.*) This is Mitzi's doll. You see how she longs for her little mistress! How pale she has become . . . and she seems to know where Mitzi is, because she's always looking up into the heavens . . . do you see . . . no matter which way I hold her, her eyes follow the stars like the needle of a compass . . . she is my compass who always shows me where the heavens are . . . she should be dressed in black, being in mourning, but we are so poor . . . do you know why we never have any money? Because God was angry with us because of our sins. "The righteous suffer no want!"

THE STRANGER. Where did you learn all this?

THE LADY. In the book, in which all things are written . . . everything! . . . (*She muffles up the doll in her cloak.*) See, she is beginning to grow cold—but that is because of the clouds up there . .

THE STRANGER. How can you risk travelling in the mountains alone?

THE LADY. God watches over me; what can any man do to me!

THE STRANGER. Weren't you troubled by the sick people at the pond?

THE LADY (*turns around to the pond*). I don't see them—I see nothing ugly any more!

THE STRANGER. Ingeborg! I have made you evil, and you are on the way to making me good!—Do you know that it was a dream of mine to reach an atonement—through a woman! You don't believe that! But it's true, nevertheless! Just as before nothing possessed any value for me, unless I could lay it at the feet of a woman! But as an offering to beauty and goodness, not as a tribute to a greedy mistress . . . It was my passion to give; but she wanted to take, not to receive; that is why I hated her . . . when I became entirely helpless and believed the end to be near, I developed a longing to fall asleep on the knees of a mother, on a giant bosom where I could bury my weary head and could drink in all the tenderness, which I had always missed . . .

THE LADY. You have no mother?

THE STRANGER. I never had one!—And I have never felt related to my father or to my sisters and brothers . . . Ingeborg, I was the son of a bondwoman, of whom it was written: "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the freewoman's son . . . "

THE LADY. Do you know why Ishmael was cast out? It is to be read a little further back—because he was a scoffer! And then it is also said: "He will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in opposition to all his brethren!"

THE STRANGER. Is that written, too?

THE LADY. Yes, my child, everything is written!

THE STRANGER. Everything?

THE LADY. Everything! There you will find the answers to all of your questions, even the most burning . . .

THE STRANGER. Call me your child, then I will love you . . . and when I love anyone, I serve, obey, allow myself to be abused, suffer, endure patiently . . .

THE LADY. You should not love me, but your Creator . . .

THE STRANGER. But He is so unkind—like my father!

THE LADY. He is Love,—and you are Hate!

THE STRANGER. You are His daughter, but I am His cast-out son . . .

THE LADY (*caressingly*). Hush! Be still! You . .

THE STRANGER. Do you know what I have suffered these last eight days . . . I don't know where I've come to!

THE LADY. Where, then?

THE STRANGER. I have a landlady there in the hut . . . who looks at me, as if I had come to eat up her last bit of bread . . . She says nothing, and that is the worst! I think she prays whenever she sees me . . .

THE LADY. What kind of prayers?

THE STRANGER. Such as are said behind the backs of those who are evil and bring misfortune . . .

THE LADY. How strange! But you know yourself that your eyes can be deceived!

THE LANDLADY (*comes up to the table*). That is your sister, I presume, sir?

THE STRANGER. Yes, for the present, we can call her that.

THE LANDLADY (*to* THE LADY). That I should meet someone else, to whom I can say what I have been wanting to say! Look, the gentleman is so quiet that one has to respect him, particularly since he seems to be in trouble . . . But I will talk to his sister, and he shall hear it—that from the moment he came into my house, it has been blessed. Misfortune had followed me; I had no lodgers, my only cow had died, my husband was in the home for drunkards, and my children had nothing to eat. I prayed to God, that he should send me help from Heaven—because from earth I expected nothing more . . . then this man came! Apart from the fact that he has given me twice as much as I demanded, he brought me good fortune—and my house was blessed!—God bless you, kind sir!

THE STRANGER (*gets up, excited*). Stop talking, woman, you are disgraceful!

THE LADY. He doesn't believe! Oh, God, he doesn't believe!—Look at me!

THE STRANGER. Now, when I look at you, I believe!—She blesses me!—And I, the damned, have brought her blessing! How can I believe that? . . . I, I! (*He falls down on the table and weeps in his hands.*)

THE LADY. He weeps! Tears, rain from Heaven which softens the rocks, falls on his stony heart! . . . He weeps!

THE LANDLADY. Oh, he, the golden heart, the open hand, who is so good to my children!

THE LADY. You hear? Do you hear?

THE LANDLADY. Only one thing I haven't been able to understand . . .

THE LADY. And that was?

THE LANDLADY. Only a trifle, but in any case . . .

THE LADY. What was it?

THE LANDLADY. He could not endure my dog!

THE LADY. I find it very noble of him, that he should have an antipathy toward a foul animal. I abhor everything animal, in myself and in others, but I don't hate animals on that account, because I hate nothing that has been created . . .

THE STRANGER. . Thank you, Ingeborg.

THE LADY. You see, I have an eye for your good qualities, even if you don't think so! . . . There is the Confessor!

(THE CONFESSOR *enters*).

THE LANDLADY. Then I must be going! Because the Confessor doesn't like me! (*She goes.*)

THE LADY. The Confessor loves all mankind.

THE CONFESSOR (*steps forward, and speaks to* THE LADY). And you most of all, my child, because you are goodness itself. Whether or not you are outwardly beautiful, I cannot tell, but I know that you are because you are good . . . Yes, you are the bride of my youth and my spiritual mate; and you will always remain that, because you have given to me what the others could never get; I have lived your life in the spirit; I have endured your sufferings; tasted your joys—no, because you had none, except your child . . . only the beauty of your soul have I seen—our friend here has sensed it, and on that account was attracted to you—but the evil in him was too strong and you had to assume it, in order to liberate him. In a state of strife, you endured all the tortures of hell, suffered on his account, until you reached a state of reconciliation. Your work is finished! Go in peace!

THE LADY. Where?

THE CONFESSOR. Up there! Where the sun always shines!

THE LADY (*rises*). Is there a home up there for me, too?

THE CONFESSOR. Up there, there is a home for everyone! . . . I will show you the way! (*He goes with her, into the background.*)

(THE STRANGER *makes a movement.*)

THE CONFESSOR. Are you impatient? . . . Then don't be! (*He goes.*)

(THE STRANGER *remains sitting alone.*)

(The Worshippers of Venus *rise, approach* The Stranger, *and form a circle around him.*)

The Stranger. What do they want of me?

The Worshippers of Venus. Hail! Father!

The Stranger (*in extreme pain*). Why?

First Voice. Because we are your children! Your favorites!

The Stranger (*tries to escape, but is closed in by the circle*). Let me alone! Let me go!

Second Voice (*a pale youth*). Don't you recognize me, father?

The Tempter (*appears in the background, at the left of the cross-road*). Haha!

Second Voice. I am Eric, your son!

The Stranger. Eric?—You here?

Second Voice. I am here!

The Stranger. God pity us! . . . And you, my child, forgive me!

Second Voice. Never! . . . You have shown me the way to the sulphur-spring! Is it very far to the sea?

(The Stranger *falls down.*)

The Tempter. Haha! *Jubilate, temptatores!*

The Worshippers of Venus. Sulphur! Sulphur! Sulphur! And mercury!

The Tempter (*steps forward and prods* The Stranger *with his foot*). The worm! . . . Whom anyone can convince of anything! But that comes of his incredible arrogance! Didn't he cherish the notion that he was to be the animus of the universe, the author of all evil? This fool thought he would teach the young people to pay homage to Venus, but when have the young not known how to do that—and long before he was born! . . . His pride is intolerable and he has the audacity to interfere with me in my affairs . . . Give him another salute, false Eric!

(Second Voice *bows down to* The Stranger *and whispers in his ear.*)

The Tempter. There were seven deadly sins: they have become eight. And the eighth one, I have discovered! It is called despair. Because to doubt that there is good and not to hope for pardon is like calling (*he lingers over the word, "God," which he utters, as if it burned his lips.*) God evil. That is slander, abnegation, blasphemy . . . how he twists himself!

THE STRANGER (*gets up quickly and looks* THE TEMPTER *in the eyes*). Who are you?

THE TEMPTER. Your brother . . . Don't we resemble one another? . . . Certain of your features remind me of my portrait.

THE STRANGER. Where have I seen your portrait?

THE TEMPTER. Almost everywhere . . . I may be found in the churches frequently, but not among the holy ones . . .

THE STRANGER. I cannot recall . . .

THE TEMPTER. Is it so long since you have visited a church? . . . I usually appear in the same picture as Saint George . . .

(THE STRANGER'S *whole body trembles, and he tries to escape, but cannot.*)

THE TEMPTER. Michael and I are also to be seen in a group sometimes, in which, to be sure, I do not occupy the most favorable position; but that can be changed! Everything can be changed and sometime the last will be the first . . . That is just the way with you! For the moment you are somewhat fallen, but that can be altered . . . if you have enough intelligence to choose better company . . . you have had too much intercourse with petticoats, my young man! Petticoats stir up the dust, and dust heaps itself on the eyes and the breast . . . Come and sit down, young man, and we will chat a little. (*He leads* THE STRANGER, *jestingly by the ear, to the table.*) Sit down and tremble, young man! (*They sit down.*)

THE TEMPTER. Come, now! What shall we discuss? Wine—and a little woman? No? That is too old, too old; as old as Doctor Faustus! Bon! We moderns will seek spiritual debauchery . . . So you are on the way to the holy men up there, who believe that the man who sleeps cannot sin! To the discouraged ones, who have given up the battle of life, because they underwent some defeat; to the snarers who enmesh souls.—And, freeing! Has a holy man ever freed you of the burden of sin? No! . . . Do you know why sin has oppressed you for such a length of time? Because, through resignation and continence, you have reached such a state of weakness that anyone who wishes may fight for your soul and set up residence in it—even from a distance . . . You have so utterly destroyed your personality that you see with foreign eyes, hear with foreign ears, think with foreign thoughts—in a word, you have com-

mitted self-murder of the soul. Just now, didn't you speak well of the enemies of mankind, of the woman who made of Paradise a hell! You needn't answer; I can read the answer in your eyes, and hear it on your lips . . . you speak of a pure love to a woman! That is lust, young fellow, lust for any woman, for which we must pay so dearly. You say that you do not crave it! Then why do you want to be near her? . . . You want to have a friend? Take a masculine! . . . you have allowed yourself to be convinced that you were no woman-hater! The little woman answered correctly when she said: Every healthy man is a woman-hater, but he cannot survive unless he has relations with his enemy! Now how do you feel? . . . Well, and then you saw the sick people here and thought that you had brought them to their misery. They are rash fellows, believe me; in a few days they can tear themselves away from their occupations and return again . . . yes, yes, yes, Eric the false is a rascal! But you have reached such a state that you are unable to distinguish your own children from strangers. Wouldn't it be pleasant if you could extricate yourself from this entanglement! What? You see, I can free you . . . but I am no holy man . . . Now we will call the old Maja! (*He whistles through his fingers.*)

(The Old Maja *enters.*)

The Tempter. See, there you are! Well, what are you wandering about here for? Haven't you something to settle with this fellow?

The Old Maja. No! He is so good, and he was always so good, but he had a horrid wife.

The Tempter (*to* The Stranger). Indeed, you see! . . . No one has ever told you that! . . . On the contrary! She was the good angel whom you had defiled . . . we all know that! . . . Well, old Maja, what is he raving about? He says that remorse has plagued him for seven years because he owed you money.

The Old Maja. Once he did owe me a small sum, but I recovered that a long time ago and with a great deal of interest, much more than I could have gotten in the savings-bank. That was fair enough!

The Stranger (*starts up*). What are you saying? Is it possible that I have forgotten?

The Tempter. Have you a receipt, old Maja? Then, show it to him!

THE OLD MAJA. He has the receipt, but I have a bank-book here; he deposited the money in my name. (*She holds out a bank-book and passes it to* THE STRANGER, *who looks at it.*)

THE STRANGER. Yes, it's right, and now I remember! . . . But why these torrents of shame and disgrace for seven years? The reproaches of long, sleepless nights? Why, why, why?

THE TEMPTER. You can go now, old Maja! . . . but first say something nice about this self-tormentor! Don't you remember some humane trait about this wild animal that has been hunted by men for so long . . .

THE STRANGER (*to* THE OLD MAJA). Keep quiet! Don't say anything! (*He holds his hands over his ears.*)

THE TEMPTER. Well, Maja?

THE OLD MAJA. Yes, I know too well what the people say about him, but that applies only to his writing—and I haven't read any of that, because I can't read . . . and no one *has* to read what he has written, unless he wants to . . . in any case, he was so good . . . now, he is covering his ears. No, I can't flatter him, either . . . but I will whisper it to you . . . (*She whispers something to* THE TEMPTER.)

THE TEMPTER. Yes, yes: All easily moved people are hunted like wild animals! That is a rule! Good-bye, old Maja!

THE OLD MAJA. Good-bye, kind sirs! . . . (*She goes.*)

THE STRANGER. Why have I innocently suffered for seven years?

THE TEMPTER (*pointing with a finger above*). Ask up there!

THE STRANGER. Where I will never obtain an answer!

THE TEMPTER. Yes, that may be! . . . You think that I am looking well?

THE STRANGER. No, I'm afraid I can't agree to that!

THE TEMPTER. You look quite sour yourself! Do you know why we appear so?

THE STRANGER. No!

THE TEMPTER. The hatefulness and the wickedness of our fellow creatures have settled upon us. Would you believe that up there, there are holy ones who have never done any evil, but suffer for others, for their kindred, who have committed unatoned-for crimes. These angels, who have assumed the depravity of strangers, are, in the end, quite similar to bandits. Well, what will you give me for that?

THE STRANGER. I don't know who you are, but you are the

first man to tell me how I could reconcile myself with life . . . You are . . .

THE TEMPTER. Say it!

THE STRANGER. You are the liberator . . .

THE TEMPTER. And on that account . . .

THE STRANGER. On that account, you are like a vulture! . . . But, listen, have you ever thought that there might be a plausible reason for that as well as anything else? Assuming that the earth is a prison, in which preying criminals are confined—is it wise to free them? Is it right?

THE TEMPTER. What's that you say? . . . Really, I've never thought about that! Hm! Hm!

THE STRANGER. And have you ever considered that we might have been born in sin . . .

THE TEMPTER. That has nothing to do with me . . . I concern myself with the present . . .

THE STRANGER. Good! Don't you think that frequently we are punished at the wrong moment, and consequently miss the logical pattern, although it exists?

THE TEMPTER. The logic is not missing, but the whole of life is such a web of mistakes and blunders and false steps, which, considering human weakness, are comparatively unimportant, but, nevertheless, evoke a consistent revenge. Everything is revenged, even our most absurd actions. Who forgives? A noble-minded man at times, but divine justice never!

(A PILGRIM *appears in the background.*)

THE TEMPTER. See there! A penitent! I'd like to know what he's done. We'll ask him! . . . Welcome to our fields of joy, peaceful wanderer! Sit down at the table of the ascetics, where there are no further temptations!

THE PILGRIM. Thank you, fellow wanderer in the vale of tears . . .

THE TEMPTER. And why are you in such misery?

THE PILGRIM. Nothing in particular, on the contrary . . . The hour of liberation has struck, and I am going up there to seek absolution!

THE STRANGER. Tell me, haven't we met before?

THE PILGRIM. I think so!

THE STRANGER. Caesar! You are Caesar!

THE PILGRIM. I was Caesar, but not any longer.

THE TEMPTER. Haha, Caesarian acquaintances . . .

yes, I thank you! . . . well, well, well! But tell me about it. Tell me!

THE PILGRIM. You shall hear about it, now that I have the right to speak . . . The atonement is at end.—When we met before, at the house of a certain doctor, I was confined there as a madman, said to have Caesarmania. Now the Stranger will learn the truth of the matter. I never fancied anything of the kind, but scruple of conscience forced me to keep up appearances. A friend, a wicked friend, had written that I was the victim of a huge misunderstanding, but he remained silent when he should have spoken, and I interpreted his silence to be a direct challenge to remain silent also—and to suffer . . . why did I remain silent and suffer? Yes! . . . In my youth, I was once in great need. I was taken as a guest to a house far away on an island in the sea, by a man who, in spite of his unusual gifts, had been overlooked by smiling fortune, and this because of his absurd arrogance. In solitude, this man had fallen upon peculiar thoughts regarding his personality, through brooding. I noticed these things, but remained silent . . . but one day his wife confided to me that, at times, her husband was insane; he believed himself to be, at such times, Julius Caesar. For many years, I guarded this secret conscientiously, for by nature I was not ungrateful. But life is a rogue! After a lapse of several years, it came to pass that Caesar interfered in my most intimate fate with clumsy hands. In anger, I disclosed the secret of his Caesarmania, and made my earlier benefactor so ridiculed that his life became unbearable to him— But, listen, and you will hear how my nemesis came about! A year later, I wrote a book—I am a writer of little importance to be sure . . . In this book, I portrayed some of the features of my family life: I made a play with my daughter Julia—she was called Julia, like Caesar's daughter—and with my wife, whom we called Caesar's wife, because no one spoke of her . . . well, this play, in which my mother-in-law participated, came to cost me dearly . . . when I read the proofs of my books, I saw the danger . . . said to myself: "This will be your downfall." I wanted to strike out the whole business, but my pen refused, and an inner voice said to me: "Let it stand!" . . . It stood, and I fell.

THE STRANGER. But why didn't you allow your friend's letter of explanation to be published?

THE PILGRIM. No! When the misfortune occurred, I

knew at once that it was the finger of God: "This you must endure, because of your ungratefulness!"

THE STRANGER. And you suffered?

THE PILGRIM. Not a bit! I smiled to myself, and kept up appearances! And because I took my punishment quietly and humbly, the Lord eased my burden, and I did not feel at all ridiculous.

THE TEMPTER. That's a strange story, but such things do come to pass! Shall we start now? We'll undertake a pleasure-party after we've overcome the storms! . . . Tear up your roots, and we'll scale the heights!

THE STRANGER. But the Confessor told me to wait for him!

THE TEMPTER. He can always find you! And up there, in the village, there is a trial today—a most interesting case will be heard, and it may be necessary for me to testify. Come, come, come!

THE STRANGER. Yes, whether I sit here or up there makes little difference.

THE PILGRIM (*to* THE STRANGER). Who is that?

THE STRANGER. I don't know. He looks like an anarchist.

THE PILGRIM. In any case he looks fascinating.

THE STRANGER. A skeptical gentleman who has seen a good deal of life.

THE TEMPTER. Come, children! I will tell you stories on the way. Come, come, come!

(*They go into the background.*)

ACT III.

SCENE I. *A terrace in the mountain on which the cloister is situated.*

(*To the right, a rocky mountain-shelf; to the left, another shelf. The distant background discloses a bird's-eye view of a river landscape, with cities, villages, fields, and forests; furthest in the distance the sea. On the fore-stage is an apple tree bearing fruit. Beneath it, a long table, with a stool on the narrow side and benches along the wide side. In the foreground, to the right, a corner of the town-hall. The clouds, at this moment, seem to hang directly above the village.*

At the narrow side of the table, the magistrate presides as judge; the council sits at the long sides. The defendant stands to the right of the judge, the witnesses to the left, among whom is THE TEMPTER.

The listeners, among whom are THE PILGRIM *and* THE STRANGER, *stand here and there around the judge's table.*)

THE MAGISTRATE. Defendant, present?

THE DEFENDANT. Present.

THE MAGISTRATE. This is a very grievous affair, and has brought shame and sorrow to our little community. Florian Reicher, twenty-three years old, is accused of shooting the bride of Fritz Schlipitskas, with the full intention of killing her. We are faced by a deliberate murder and the course of the law is distinct and clear . . . Has the accused anything to say in his defense, or any mitigating circumstances to plead?

THE DEFENDANT. No!

THE TEMPTER. Holla!

THE MAGISTRATE. Who are you?

THE TEMPTER. Counsel for the defense.

THE MAGISTRATE. The defendant, of course, has the right to name his counsel, but in such a clear case as this, I believe that the people have already reached a definite verdict on the facts, and the murderer can hardly hope to regain their sympathies! Isn't that so?

THE PEOPLE. He is already condemned!

THE TEMPTER. By whom?

THE PEOPLE. By the law and by his deed.

THE TEMPTER. Wait a minute! . . . As counsel for the defense, I am his representative, and, as such, assume the accusations heaped upon him . . . I ask to be heard.

THE MAGISTRATE. We can hardly refuse him that!

THE PEOPLE. Florian is already condemned!

THE TEMPTER. First you shall hear me! . . . I had reached my eighteenth year—Florian speaks—my thoughts, guarded by the watchful eye of a pious mother, were pure, and my heart was without baseness, entirely without baseness, for I had not yet seen or experienced anything evil. Then I met—Florian, that is—in the course of things, a young girl who epitomized beauty in my eyes, such beauty as I had never before seen on this sinful earth—for she was the embodiment of virtue. I offered her my heart, my hand, and my future . . . she accepted everything and loved me faithfully. For five years I had to serve for Rachel* and I served, heaping blade of straw upon blade for the little nest that we wanted to build . . . My whole life de-

*See Genesis, 29:20—*The Translator.*

pended upon the love of this woman! And I myself was faithful to her, entertaining no doubts . . . In the fifth year . . . I had built the little house and gathered together the furniture . . . then I discovered that she had been playing with me, and that during all this time, she had had at least three lovers . . .

THE MAGISTRATE. Are there witnesses present?

THE CONSTABLE. Three competent witnesses; I, the constable, am one!

THE MAGISTRATE. The constable alone is enough.

THE TEMPTER. So I shot her; not out of revenge, but to free myself of the unwholesome thoughts which her infidelity had aroused in me, because when I tried to obliterate her picture from my heart, there always arose, in its place, other pictures of her lovers—finally I came to believe that it was I who had entered into an illicit relationship with three men—through a woman who had been the intermediate party!

THE MAGISTRATE. That must have been jealousy!

THE TEMPTER. Yes, a jealousy which, like a feeling of cleanliness, would not allow my thoughts to be soiled by external influences . . . if I could have put up with the matter, or if I had not been jealous, I would have entered into a relationship with vice, something which I could never have tolerated. So she had to die, and my thoughts had to be purified of the deadly sin. I have spoken!

THE PEOPLE. The dead woman is guilty! Let her be unavenged!

THE MAGISTRATE. The dead woman is guilty, because she was the cause of the crime.

THE FATHER OF THE DEAD WOMAN. Your Honor, judge of my dead child, and you, my fellow citizens, let me speak.

THE MAGISTRATE. Let the father of the dead woman speak!

THE FATHER OF THE DEAD WOMAN. You accuse the dead: I reply!—Maria, my child has, no doubt, seriously erred, and is responsible for the crime of this man! Without doubt!

THE PEOPLE. Without doubt! She is the guilty one!

THE FATHER OF THE DEAD WOMAN. Let her father say a word in explanation, if not in vindication . . . When Maria was fifteen years old, she fell into the hands of a man, who seemed to have made a business of enticing young girls, just as the bird-catcher traps little birds; he was no seducer in the usual sense of the word, because he contented himself with dulling the senses of

his victims, entangling their feelings in such a manner that he was able afterwards to kick them and watch them, while they, with broken hearts and burnt wings, agonized in the tortures of love—tortures which surpass all others! . . . For three years, Maria convalesced in an institution for the mentally diseased, and when she was finally released, she went to pieces, literally broke into several pieces—one could almost say, several persons. She was a good angel and feared God, on the one hand, and on the other, she was a demon who abused everything that was holy. There were times when I saw her leave a dance, intoxicated, and go to her beloved Florian, and heard her change her tongue and transform her face to such an extent, that I would have sworn it was not the same person. But, to me, she seemed to be just as real in either case. Was she guilty, or was her seducer guilty?

THE PEOPLE. She was not guilty! Who is her seducer?

THE FATHER OF THE DEAD WOMAN. There he stands!

THE TEMPTER. Yes! It is I.

THE PEOPLE. Stone him!

THE MAGISTRATE. Order! Order! He shall be heard first!

THE TEMPTER. *Bon*! . . . well . . The deponent was born of poor but, for the most part, honorable parents; from the moment of his birth, he belonged to that rare species of birds, who, in their youth, seek their Creator, but unavailingly . . . this youthful quest was accompanied by a purity of heart and a timidity which evoked smiles, even from his nurses—yes, we smile now, when we hear that he refused to change his linens anywhere except in the dark recesses of the closet! But even if we have become quite hardened by the trials of life, we must still find something beautiful in this innocence, and, as we grow older, something quite touching, even though we stand here and smile . . . You may scoff, listeners!

THE MAGISTRATE (*earnestly*). You fail to appreciate your listeners!

THE TEMPTER. Then I must be ashamed of myself! He became a youth and fell into a series of snares which lay in wait for his childish innocence! I am an old sinner, but I blush at this moment (*He removes his hat.*)—yes, look at me—when I remember the Potiphar-women's-world in which this young man found himself! There was not a single woman . . . No, I shame myself in the name of mankind and of womankind—you will ex-

cuse me . . . There were moments, when I would not have believed my eyes, but thought that some demon had blinded my vision . . . The holiest ties—(*he bites his tongue*)—no, be quiet! Mankind feels shamed! . . . Enough that I continued to battle until I was twenty-five; the smiles of others did not daunt me, the . . . yes, I was called Joseph and *was* Joseph! I was jealous of my virtue; I felt wounded by the glance of an unchaste woman . . . but, finally, I fell, led astray in a most scandalous manner! And then I became a slave to my passions; I sat endlessly at the side of Omphale and spun, until I had sunk into the depths of the deepest humiliation, and suffered, suffered, suffered! But it was really my body which had become degraded; my soul—lived its own life—its own pure, clean life, that at least I can say for it. And I caroused about, innocently looking for chaste young maidens, who, in all likelihood, experienced that feeling of sympathy which attracts us to them. Then, without boasting, they were attracted to me . . . I refused to go beyond the bounds of discretion; but they insisted upon it, and when I sought to escape the imminent danger, their hearts were broken, as they maintained. In a word: I have never led astray an innocent maiden! I swear it! . . . Am I to blame, then, for the heartaches of this young lady, who became melancholy as a result? Am I not to be commended, on the contrary, for having discouraged her from taking the final step which would have led to her downfall?—Who will throw the first stone at me?—Nobody! Then I have *not* appreciated my listeners! And I thought that I would have to stand here like a fool and plead my innocence! . . . I feel young again, and I would like to ask a little forgiveness of mankind! I saw the cynical smile on the lips of the woman who seduced me in my youth. Step forward, woman, and look at your work of destruction; look at what you have sown . . .

THE WOMAN (*steps forward timidly, yet dignified*). I am the one of whom he speaks . . . Listen to me and let me tell you the simple story of how *I* was seduced in my youth, by a man who, fortunately, is here today . . .

THE MAGISTRATE. Dear friends! I must interrupt these proceedings, otherwise we will eventually reach back to Eve in Paradise . . .

THE TEMPTER. Who led Adam astray in his youth! Yes, that is the end of our argument. Eve! Come to us, Eve! Eve! (*He strikes with his cane in the air.*)

(*The tree-trunk becomes transparent, and* EVE *appears, draped in her hair, a girdle around her loins.*)

THE TEMPTER. Well, Eve, mother, you led our father astray. Accused, what have you to say in your defense?

EVE (*simply, yet majestically*). The serpent deceived me!

THE TEMPTER. An excellent reply! Eve has acquitted herself! Come forward, serpent! The serpent!

(EVE *disappears.*)

THE TEMPTER. Forward, serpent!

(*The serpent appears in the tree-trunk.*)

THE TEMPTER. Here you see the seducer of all of us. Well, serpent, and who led *you* astray?

ALL (*terrified*). Be quiet, you slanderer!

THE TEMPTER. Serpent! Answer!

(*A thunder-clap, with lightning; all rush away, except* THE TEMPTER, *who has fallen to the ground,* THE PILGRIM, THE STRANGER *and* THE LADY.)

THE TEMPTER (*prostrate, but recovering himself; he assumes a posture similar to that of the antique statue, "The Grinder" or "The Slave."*) *Causa finalis* or the final cause—which man never comes to know! . . . But if the serpent is guilty, then we are proportionately innocent! But man must not know that . . . The defendant, in any case, seems to have been relieved of the matter! And the court of justice to have dispelled like smoke! Yes! Yes! Judge not! Judge not, judge not!

THE LADY (*to* THE STRANGER). Come with me!

THE STRANGER. But I want to listen to this man . . .

THE LADY. Why? He is just like a little child: he asks about all those things for which there are no answers. Haven't you heard how little children always ask: "Papa, why does the sun set in the west?"—Can you answer such a question?

THE STRANGER. Hm!

THE LADY. Or: "Mama, who created God?" You find that disturbing!—Come with me!

THE STRANGER (*struggles with his admiration for* THE TEMPTER). Yes, but that about Eve . . . that was new . . .

THE LADY. By no means; I read about it in the Bible when I was eight years old! And that we inherit the guilt of our ancestors is written in the laws of the land . . . Come, my child!

THE TEMPTER (*rises, shakes himself like a wet dog, and climbs*

haltingly up the rock shelf to the right). Come with me; I will show you the world, which you think you know, but in reality have never seen!

THE LADY (*climbs up the rock shelf to the left*). Come here, my child, I will show you God's beautiful world, as I have learned to see it, since the tears of grief washed the dust from my eyes . . . Come to me!

(THE STRANGER *stands wavering between the two.*)

THE TEMPTER. How have you seen the world through your tears? How the willows on the bank mirror themselves in the excited waters! A chaos of crooked lines, in which the trees seem to stand on their heads . . . No, child, with my telescope, dried at the fire of hate—with my earth-reed, I behold everything as it really is . . . sharply, distinctly defined!

THE LADY. But what do you know of things, child? It isn't the thing that is in the eye, but the image of the thing, and the image is an appearance, a semblance, and not the thing itself. You haggle over images and appearances!

THE TEMPTER. Listen to her! A little philosopher in petticoats . . . By God, such a disputation requires an auditorium such as we have here in the mountains! Holla!

THE LADY. I have my audience here—my friend, my husband, my child! If he heeds me, good, then everything will be well for me, and for him! . . . Come here my friend. This is the only way! Here is the mountain Gerizim* where one is blessed!—Over there is Ebal,* where one is cursed!

THE TEMPTER. Yes, here is Ebal, where one is cursed: "Unto the woman He said: 'I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy travail; in pain shalt thou bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee!'" And then, "Unto Adam he said: '. . . cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground!'" Thus spoke the Lord, not I!

THE LADY. And God blessed the first pair; and God blessed the seventh day, on which his work was finished—his good work. But you—but we, we have made it evil, and on that account, on that account . . . But he who obeys the command of God lives on Gerizim, where blessings are still dispensed. Thus

*See Deuteronomy, 11:29—*The Translator.*

spoke the Lord: "Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt though be in the field . . . Blessed shall be thy basket and thy kneading-trough. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out . . . The Lord will open unto thee His good treasure the heaven to give the rain of thy land in its season, and to bless all the work of thy hand; and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow . . . and thou shalt be above only and thou shalt not be beneath; if thou shalt hearken unto the commandments of the Lord thy God . . . " Come, then, my friend, and put your hand in mine! (*She falls on her knees, her hands folded suppliantly.*) I beg of you, by the love which once joined us, by the memory of the child that bound us together; with the strength of a mother's love—mother, mother, mother—for I *have* loved you in such a fashion, you lost child, whom I have sought for in the deepest confines of the forest, to find you at last, dying of hunger, drooping from want of love! Come back, sorrowful child, and bury your weary head on my heart, where it reposed before you gazed upon the light of the sun! (*She transforms herself, during this speech, so that her dress falls away, and she stands dressed in white, her hair flowing, her luxuriantly full breasts inviting.*)

THE STRANGER. My mother!

THE LADY. Yes, child, your mother! In life I could never caress you—the will of higher powers prevented it . . . Why? I dare not ask myself . . .

THE STRANGER. My mother? But she is dead!

THE LADY. She was—but the dead are not really dead; mother-love conquers death! Don't you know that? Come, my child, I will pay for my errors; on my knees, I will rock you to sleep; I will bathe you so that you will be free of . . . (*She hisses the words that she cannot bring to her lips*) hate and sin. I will comb out your hair, which has been stuck together by the cold-sweat of anxiety, and your white shirt, I will warm at the hearth of the home, of the home which you have never had, you peaceless, homeless one, son of Hagar,* the servant, born of a bondwoman, against whom every hand was lifted! . . . The ploughmen, who plough your back and dig their furrows deep . . . Come, I will heal your wounds and endure your sufferings . . . Come!

THE STRANGER (*has wept so violently that his whole body is*

*See Genesis, 16:1—*The Translator.*

trembling. Now he goes to the left cliff, where the mother stands with open arms). I am coming!

THE TEMPTER. Over such things, I have no power! . . . But another time we will meet again. (*He disappears behind the cliff.*)

SCENE II. *A cliff-landscape in the mountain on which the cloister is situated*

(*Higher up in the mountain; a cliff-landscape in a cloud, surrounded on all sides by the waters of a lake.* THE MOTHER, *on a cliff, climbs, until she disappears in the cloud.* THE STRANGER *remains standing, exhausted.*)

THE STRANGER. Oh, mother, mother! Why are you deserting me? And at just the moment when my most beautiful dream was almost fulfilled!

THE TEMPTER (*steps forward*) What was your dream? Tell me!

THE STRANGER. My fondest hope, my deepest longing, and my last prayer! . . . Reconciliation with mankind through the woman . . .

THE TEMPTER . . . the woman that taught you to hate . . .

THE STRANGER. Certainly, because she bound me to the earth; like the round ball which the slave drags at his foot, so that he cannot escape . . .

THE TEMPTER. Ha, the woman—always the woman!

THE STRANGER. Yes, the woman! The beginning and the end—at least, for us men. To each other, they are nothing.

THE TEMPTER. Nothing in themselves, everything to us, through us! Our honor and our shame; our greatest joy, our deepest sorrow; our salvation and our downfall; our reward and our punishment; our strength and our weakness.

THE STRANGER. Our shame! You are right! Tell me, wise man, why is it that every time I take a woman, my woman, my beautiful, adored woman by the arm and lead her before other people, I am as ashamed of myself as if I were exposing a weakness. Solve that riddle for me!

THE TEMPTER. You are ashamed of yourself? . . . I don't know why!

THE STRANGER. You—you cannot answer?

THE TEMPTER. I cannot answer!—I have always tolerated the presence of other people in my wife's company, even though

I felt that she was smirched by their glances, and I through her.

THE STRANGER. And when she did some shameful thing, *you* were disgraced! Why?

THE TEMPTER. The Eve of the Greeks was known as Pandora, and was created by Zeus in anger, in order that he might torture men and rule over them. As a wedding-present, she received a box which contained all the misfortunes in the world. Perhaps the riddle of this sphinx will be better solved if it is viewed from the heights of Olympus instead of from the pleasure gardens of Paradise! It will never be solved entirely, of course! And I am just as clever as you are! But while I meditate, I still enjoy the most beautiful thing that creation has given to us!—Go and do the same.

THE STRANGER. The most fascinating delusion of Satan, you mean. Because that which may be the most beautiful to me, may be the most revolting to another! Even with me, if she becomes wicked, she may likewise become the ugliest of women! What, then, is beauty?

THE TEMPTER. A pretence, a reflection of your own goodness! (*He holds his hand over his mouth.*) You see, there I have let it out . . . and now . . . now the demon is set free!

THE STRANGER. Demon? Yes, indeed! But if she *is* a demon, how can she make me desire chastity and virtue? Because that is just what happened to me, when I first saw her; at that time, I was seized with a desire to become like her and to be worthy of her. First I tried by means of exercises and baths, toilet articles and fashionable clothes, but I was only ridiculous. Then I began from the inside; I got into the habit of thinking lovely thoughts, speaking lovely words and conducting myself in a noble manner. And lo, one day, having modelled my exterior after my soul, I became her image—at least, that is what she said. And it was she who first uttered those lovely words: "I love you!" How could a devil have exalted us so; how could an infernal spirit have insinuated good into us in such a manner how . . . No, it was an angel! A fallen angel, to be sure; and her love was a beam broken from the great light which everlastingly warms and loves!—loves!—loves!

THE TEMPTER. No, old youth, we will not stand here like youngsters and discuss the problems of love . . .

THE CONFESSOR (*enters*). Now what is this babbler telling you? He has chattered his whole life away, never entirely finishing anything he started!

THE TEMPTER. I would have been a priest, but I wasn't called!

THE CONFESSOR. While you are waiting for your call, perhaps you will help me find a drunkard who drowned himself here in the lake. He must be around here somewhere, because I've followed his footprints up to this place.

THE TEMPTER. Then it must be that man lying there under the brushwood!

THE CONFESSOR (*lifts up some branches, and exposes the body of a well-dressed young man, white-faced*). Yes, that's him! (*He loses himself in reflection, while he contemplates the dead man.*)

THE TEMPTER. Who was the dead man?

THE CONFESSOR. Wonderful! . . . Marvelous!

THE TEMPTER. He was a handsome man! Little more than a young man still!

THE CONFESSOR. No, my friends! He was fifty-four years old! And when I saw him a week ago, he appeared sixty-four. His eyes were grey-yellow, like the slime of a garden snail, and bloodshot in the corners because he drank too much;—and because he wept blood in his misery and his vice. His face was brown and bloated like the liver on the butcher's counter, and he hid himself in shame from the eyes of men—even until the very end, he seems to have been ashamed of his corruption, because he concealed his face under the brushwood. I saw him struggle against his vice; I saw him, after he had been dismissed from his position as teacher, beg deliverance of God, on his knees . . . But! . . . Yes, now he is liberated! And look, now the evil has disappeared from him; and the good and the beautiful that was in him, has come back to take its place: that's the way he looked when he was nineteen years old! . . . That is the sin, which is imposed as punishment . . . Why? That we will never learn. "Whoever hates the righteous shall be guilty!" is clearly written! . . . Or . . . I knew him when he was young! And now I remember . . . he was constantly cruel to those who did not drink. Judged and condemned, because he placed his worship of Bacchus above all other earthly pleasures! Now he is free! Free from the sin, the shame, the ugliness . . . yes, he is handsome in death! Death is the

liberator!—Do you hear that, you who have not once been able to free a drunkard from his most evil vice!

THE TEMPTER. Sin as punishment? Yes, that's not so bad! Very profound!

THE CONFESSOR. It is meant to be so! There you have a new subject for debate!

THE TEMPTER. Now I am going to leave you gentlemen for a while . . . We will see each other soon again! (*He goes.*)

THE CONFESSOR. Well, I have just seen you in the company of a woman! Then, there are still temptations?

THE STRANGER. Not of the kind you mean.

THE CONFESSOR. What kind, then?

THE STRANGER. I could, of course, still consider a reconciliation with mankind and with womankind—through a woman! Through the woman who was once my wife, and who now, through the sorrow and misery which have exalted her and purified her, has become that which I once thought her to be. But . . .

THE CONFESSOR. But . . . ?

THE STRANGER. Experience has taught me that—the nearer, the further away; the further away from one another, the closer.

THE CONFESSOR. I have known that all along—Dante knew it when he dedicated his whole life to the soul of Beatrice; Beethoven knew it when he was—united in marriage—from a distance—to Theresa of Brunswick, the wife of another!

THE STRANGER. And yet! . . . Happiness is only to be found near her!

THE CONFESSOR. Then stay near her!

THE STRANGER. You forget one thing—that we are divorced!

THE CONFESSOR. Good! Then get married again! It should be all the more successful because you are both new persons.

THE STRANGER. Do you think—that anyone will marry us?

THE CONFESSOR. I?—That's asking too much!

THE STRANGER. I'd forgotten that! Then let's find someone! But what about a home . . .

THE CONFESSOR. You're very fortunate, even though you prefer to think otherwise. Down there below the river is a little house; it's just been built, and the owner has never seen it . . . He was an Englishman, who was supposed to marry, but at

the last moment, she broke the engagement . . . His secretary had it built, but neither of the betrothed couple ever so much as glanced at it. In perfect condition . . .

THE STRANGER. Is it for rent?

THE CONFESSOR. Certainly!

THE STRANGER. Good, then I'll make a stab at it! And try to begin life all over again!

THE CONFESSOR. Then you'll go down?

THE STRANGER. Out of the clouds! . . . Down there the sun still shines; up here the air is a bit too rarefied.

THE CONFESSOR. Good! Then we part again—for some time to come!

THE STRANGER. Where are you going?

THE CONFESSOR. Up there!

THE STRANGER. And I down—to the earth, to the mother with the soft breasts and the warm bosom . . .

THE CONFESSOR. Until once again you long for the stone-hard, the cold, the white . . . Goodbye! My regards to those below!

(*Each goes in his own direction.*)

SCENE III. *The Little House in the Mountain in which the Cloister is Situated*

(*A beautifully wainscotted dining-room, with an earthenware stove of majolica. The dining-table, in the middle of the room, is covered with vases full of flowers; two candelabra with many burning candles. To the right, two windows. To the left, a large carved buffet. In the background, two doors; the left one stands open and permits a view of* THE LADY'S *sitting-room, finished in light-green and mahogany; a standing-lamp of brass, with a large citron-yellow shade. The right door is closed. To the left, behind the buffet, is an entrance from the corridor.*

THE STRANGER, *dressed as a bridegroom, and* THE LADY, *dressed as a bride, enter from the left, radiating youth and beauty.*)

THE STRANGER Welcome to my house, beloved; to your home and my home, my bride; to your dwelling, my wife.

THE LADY Thank you, dearest friend! This is just like a fairy-tale!

THE STRANGER. Yes, a fairy-tale! A whole collection of fairy-tales, which I have written.

(*They sit down on either side of the table.*)

THE LADY. Is this real? It seems too beautiful to be true!

THE STRANGER. I've never before seen you quite so young, quite so pretty!

THE LADY. That's your eyes . . .

THE STRANGER. That have learned! Yes, and your goodness was the teacher . . .

THE LADY. Schooled in grief . . .

THE STRANGER. Ingeborg!

THE LADY. For the first time you call me by my real name!

THE STRANGER. The first time? I have never met Ingeborg; I have never before known as I do now, sitting here in the atmosphere of our home. Home! Lovely word! Lovely thing that I have never before possessed. Home and wife! You are my first, my only wife, because what took place before no longer exists, just as the hour which has just gone by is no more!

THE LADY. Orpheus! You have sung life and beauty into these dead stones! Now sing life into me, too . . .

THE STRANGER . . Eurydice, whom I have fetched from the underworld! I will breathe life into you, I will create you, and happiness will come to us, now that we know what dangers to avoid!

THE LADY. Yes, dangers! . . . It's so wonderful in this house! It's as if the room were filled with invisible guests who had come here to welcome us! Good spirits, who bless us and our home!

THE STRANGER. The flames of the candles burn straight in devotion, the flowers reflect . . . but, for all that . . .

THE LADY. Sh! Outside the warm and mysterious summer night throws a spell over everything; the stars, like huge illuminated tears, hang on the fir-trees like Christmas-candles . . . it is bliss! Hold on to it tightly!

THE STRANGER (*lost in his thoughts*). For all that . . .

THE LADY. Sh!

THE STRANGER (*rises*). I hear a poem coming! . . . It is yours!

THE LADY. You don't have to repeat it, because I can see it . . . in your eyes!

THE STRANGER. Because I read it in yours! . . . Anyway, I can't recite it; it has no words! . . . it has only fragrance, it has only color . . . And if I *were* to repeat it, it would no longer exist! Unborn, it is most beautiful! Unwon, it is loveliest!

THE LADY. Sh! . . . or our guests will go! (*Silence.*)

THE STRANGER. This is happiness . . . but I can't grasp it!

THE LADY. Look at it, breathe it, because it cannot be grasped! (*Silence.*)

THE STRANGER. You are looking at your little room!

THE LADY. As pale-green as a midsummer-meadow! And there is someone in there! Several!

THE STRANGER. My thoughts!

THE LADY. Your fine, beautiful thoughts.

THE STRANGER. Which you have given to me!

THE LADY. Did I have something to give you?

THE STRANGER. You?—Everything! But until now, my hands were not free to take what you could give! My hands were not clean enough to stroke your little heart . . .

THE LADY. Beloved, the reconciliation is near now . . .

THE STRANGER. With mankind, and with womankind—through the woman? Yes, it has happened, and blessed are you among women!

(*Candles and lamps are extinguished; the room becomes dark; only a faint light, emanating from the yellow brass lamp in* THE LADY'S *sitting-room, illuminates the stage.*)

THE LADY. Where does this darkness come from? Woe!

THE STRANGER. Where are you, beloved? Reach me your hand! I am afraid!

THE LADY. Here, dearest!

THE STRANGER. Your little hand, which you hold out to me in the darkness, which guides me over stones and thorns! Your little, soft, kind hand! Lead me to the light of your warm, bright room, as pale-green as hope.

THE LADY (*leads him into the pale-green room*). Are you afraid?

THE STRANGER. Little white dove, the frightened eagle seeks shelter of you, when the thunder of the heavens confounds his flight . . . the dove is a comfort; she does not provoke the thunder of the heavens . . .

(*They have reached the door-opening. The curtain falls.*)

* * * *

(*The same room; the table is cleared.* THE LADY *sits at it doing nothing; she seems bored. To the right, in the foreground, a window is open. Silence.*)

THE STRANGER (*enters, a paper in his hand*). Now you shall hear!

THE LADY (*absent-mindedly, resigns herself to the inevitable*). Are you through already?

THE STRANGER. Already? Are you serious? I've been working for seven days on this little poem. (*Silence.*)

THE STRANGER. Perhaps it bores you?

THE LADY (*dully*). No, of course not! (THE STRANGER *sits down at the table and considers* THE LADY.) Why are you looking at me?

THE STRANGER. I'd like to read your thoughts.

THE LADY. You know them already.

THE STRANGER. That's nothing; I want to see them! . . . (*Pause*). Because what one says is, for the most part, worthless . . . (*Pause*). May I read them?—No, I may not do that! If I do, you would have nothing further to do with me. (THE LADY *makes a movement, as if she wants to say something.*) Your face tells me enough! "Now you have absorbed me, eaten me hollow, devoured my ego, my personality . . ." And I reply: "How, my beloved? I devour your ego, when I intended to give you mine, when I let you skim the cream out of my cup—that I have filled with the experiences of a lifetime, on journeys through the desert wastes, among the thickets of art and science . . .

THE LADY. I don't deny that, but it was my experience!

THE STRANGER. Yours? What is yours? Someone else's!

THE LADY. And yours? Someone else's!

THE STRANGER. No! What I have experienced belongs to me alone! What I have read has become mine, because I have shattered it into many pieces like a glass, recast it, and out of the mass, blown a new glass of a new shape.

THE LADY. Quite so! But I cannot become yours . . .

THE STRANGER. I have become yours!

THE LADY. What have you gotten from me?

THE STRANGER. Can you ask?

THE LADY. And yet—I don't know whether you are thinking it, but somehow I sense that you wish that I were far away!

THE STRANGER. I must be a certain distance away from you, in order to be able to see you! Now you are out of focus, and your image is indistinct!

THE LADY. The nearer, the farther away!

THE STRANGER. You say that! . . . But if we were to separate, we would long for one another; and if we were to meet again, nothing would satisfy us until we had separated once more.

THE LADY. Do you think that we love one another, then?

THE STRANGER. Yes, but not as people usually love one another. We are two drops of water, afraid of coming too close to one another, lest they lose their identity and merge into one.

THE LADY. This time we were aware of the dangers and promised to avoid them . . . It seems as if it were impossible to avoid them!

THE STRANGER. And perhaps there were no dangers after all, only inevitable necessities, written as laws in the counsel of the immortal. (*Silence.*) Your love always felt like hate. And when you made me happy, you envied the happiness which you had given me!—If, on the other hand, you saw me very unhappy, you loved me all the more!

THE LADY. Shall I leave you?

THE STRANGER. It would kill me!

THE LADY. And if I remain, you will die!

THE STRANGER. Let us die together and live our life in a higher life, *our* love which does not seem to belong to this world; on another star, where there is no distance and no proximity, where two are one, where number and time and space are different than they are here!

THE LADY. I would like to die, but I don't want to . . . I think I'm dead already!

THE STRANGER. The air is too strong up here!

THE LADY. You don't love me if you can talk of such things.

THE STRANGER. You're right—there are moments when you do not exist for me. And then there are moments when I literally feel your hatred like a suffocating smoke.

THE LADY. And I have the feeling that your heart has crept out of your breast, when you are so cruel to me.

THE STRANGER. Then we hate one another . . .

THE LADY. And love one another . . .

THE STRANGER. And hate one another, because we love one another; we hate each other, because we are bound to each other; we hate the bond, we hate the love; we hate the loveliest which is the bitterest, the best that life can offer. We have reached the end.

THE LADY. Yes!

THE STRANGER. What a joke, if one takes life too seriously;

and how grave, if one jests!—You wanted to guide me toward the light with your little hand; your milder fate was to make mine easier; I wanted to lift you high up over the swamps and the quicksands, but you longed to remain below and tried to convince me that the below was the above . . . Is it possible, I ask myself, that you assume my wickedness when I am freed of it, and that I inherit your goodness? If *I* have made you evil, then I say, forgive me, and I kiss your little hand, which caresses and wounds at the same time . . . your little hand, which guides me in the darkness . . . . guides me on the long journey to Damascus . . .

THE LADY. It is goodbye, then? (*Silence.*) Then, goodbye! (*Silence.* THE LADY *goes her way.* THE STRANGER *slumps down on a chair at the table.*)

THE TEMPTER (*sticks his head in through the window, props himself up on his elbows, while he lights a cigarette*). Yes, indeed! —*C'est l'amour*! The most mysterious of all mysteries, the most imponderable of all imponderables, the most uncertain of all uncertainties.

THE STRANGER. Are you there?

THE TEMPTER. Always when a crash impends. And in affairs of the heart, there are always crashes.

THE STRANGER. Always?

THE TEMPTER. Always! Only yesterday I was at a silver wedding! Twenty-five years are not to be sniffed at—and there, for twenty-five years there had been nothing but quarrels, differences, blows, crashes! And yet, they loved one another; they thanked each other for everything good; the bad was forgotten, obliterated—because one moment of happiness compensated for ten days of hell, with needle-pricks and switch-flayings. Yes! Whoever refuses to accept the bad, cannot have the good! The shells are bitter, bitter, but the tiny kernel inside is sweet!

THE STRANGER. It is very small!

THE TEMPTER. My dear friend, it is small, but good! . . . Tell me, why did the madonna leave you?—No answer because he doesn't know . . . Now we will rent the little house again! Here is the sign-board! I will hang it out now! "To let." One comes, another goes. *C'est la vie, quoi?* Rooms for transients!

THE STRANGER. Have you been married?

THE TEMPTER. Yes, certainly!

THE STRANGER. Why did you part from your wife?

THE TEMPTER. Principally—yes, perhaps it is a characteristic of mine—principally, because—yes, you know yourself that a man marries in order to have a place to come home to, and the woman—marries mainly to go out. She wanted to go out, while I wanted to stay in! I was so constituted that I could never go out with her into society, because I felt that she was smirched by the glances of other men. Under their eyes my wife was transformed from a magnificent woman into an aping monkey, whom I naturally could not respect. Consequently, I remained at home! While she remained out. When I met her, she was like another woman; she, my pure white paper, was covered with scrawls; her beautifully clear features were modelled after the satyr-countenances of strange men; I saw the miniature-photographs of a butcher and of a guardsman mirrored in her eyes; I heard the accents of strange men in her voice; on our piano, where only the compositions of the greatest had been played, she now played the jingle-jangle tunes of strange men. In short, my whole existence had been thrust into a spiritual concubinage with strangers—and that was contrary to my nature, which had desired a *wife*! And—what else is there to say?—the sympathies of these strange men were always my antipathies. She developed a real genius for nosing out what I abhorred. And she justified her methods by saying that she was thereby "rescuing her personality." Can you understand that?

THE STRANGER. I understand, but to account for such conduct is another matter!

THE TEMPTER. And on top of it all, she maintained that she loved me, and that I did not love her. And yet I loved her so much that I deliberately chose not to speak with other people, for fear that I might be untrue to her, particularly if I found pleasure in the society of others. I had married in order to have the companionship of a woman, and in order to enjoy this companionship, I deserted all my friends—I married in order to find this companionship, but I found only a more complete loneliness! And I maintained a house and a home, in order to provide strange men with a female companion! *C'est l'amour*, my dear friend!

THE STRANGER. One should never talk about his wife!

THE TEMPTER. No! If one speaks well of her, then people laugh; if one speaks poorly of her, then they rush to her aid with

every sympathy; and if one asks them why they laughed in the first place they don't answer.

THE STRANGER. Yes! One never knows the woman one has married! One obtains her, but never succeeds in holding her—it is as if she were nobody!—After all, what is woman?

THE TEMPTER. I don't know! Perhaps a larva or a pupa, out of whose twilight sleep a man shall emerge some day. Like a child, but not a child. Tugs downward when the man pulls upward. Pulls up when the man draws down.

THE STRANGER. Wants to be of a different opinion from her husband's always; forever entertains sympathy for his antipathies; the crudest under the smoothest surface, the worst under the best! And yet, every time I have loved, I have improved myself.

THE TEMPTER. You, yes! But what about her?

THE STRANGER. Her? In the course of our love, her development has always been a recession! A paradox! And always she becomes more crude, more evil!

THE TEMPTER. Can you explain that?

THE STRANGER. No! Once, when I sought the solution to this riddle, I put myself in the wrong and imagined her to be absorbing my evil, and I, her good.

THE TEMPTER. You believe, then, that woman is dominantly false?

THE STRANGER. Yes and no! That she seeks to hide her weaknesses only signifies that she has ambitions and a sense of shame; only the whore is honest, and consequently, cynical.

THE TEMPTER. Can't you say *something* in favor of woman!

THE STRANGER. Once I had a lady-friend. She noticed that when I drank, I became more ugly than usual . . . she entreated me, therefore, not to drink! . . . I remember one evening . . . we had chatted with one another for several hours in a tavern. When it was close to ten o'clock, she begged me to go home and not to drink any more. We separated after we had bade each other goodnight. Several days later, I learned that, after she had left me, she had gone to a party and drunk and caroused until early morning . . . Well, said I, since I was seeking good in the woman, she wished me well, degrading herself only because of commercial considerations . . .

THE TEMPTER. That is well thought out, and it can be easily explained! She wanted you to be finer than herself,

nobler and purer, in order that she might be able to look up to you! Perhaps you can account for the following. The woman always mistreats her husband and is dissatisfied with him; the man, on the other hand, is always kind and grateful to her; he does everything to please her, while she does everything within her power to make him miserable.

THE STRANGER. That isn't true!—It may, no doubt, appear so sometimes . . . Yes, once I had a lady-friend, who blamed all her faults upon me. She was, for example, exceedingly in love with herself, and, therefore, called me a self-satisfied, complacent man. She drank and called me a drunkard; she seldom changed her linens, and called me filthy; she was jealous even of my masculine friends and called me Othello; she was imperious and tyrannous and called me Nero; she was greedy and avaricious and called me Harpagon.

THE TEMPTER. Why didn't you expose her, then?

THE STRANGER. What do you know of such things! At the very moment that I intended to expose her and show her what she really looked like, I would have lost her favor, and her favor I wanted more than anything else . . .

THE TEMPTER. *A tout prix!* Yes, that is the source of humiliation and degradation! You accustom yourself to remaining silent, and in the end, find yourself in a web of falsehoods . . .

THE STRANGER. Wait a moment! . . . Don't you believe that wives so confuse their own personalities that they cannot distinguish them from yours and mine, for example; cannot distinguish this person from that; cannot distinguish their own failings from those of another? My jealous friend, who called me Othello, mistook me for herself, and identified me with herself . . .

THE TEMPTER. It sounds possible!

THE STRANGER. Yes, you see! One goes furthest toward explaining most matters if he does not enquire into who is at fault. When a man and wife disagree, it is as if a state were divided against itself.

THE TEMPTER. Sometimes I really believe that it is impossible for a woman to love a man!

THE STRANGER. Perhaps! Because "to love" is an active verb and "woman" is a passive substantive. He loves, she is loved; he asks, she barely replies!

THE TEMPTER. Then what *is* the love of the woman?

THE STRANGER. The man's!

THE TEMPTER. Good—And, therefore, when a man stops loving her, she frees herself of him!

THE STRANGER. But, then . . .

THE TEMPTER. Sh! Someone is coming . . . A tenant!

THE STRANGER. A man or a woman?

THE TEMPTER. A lady! . . . and a gentleman! . . . But the gentleman remains outside . . . turns around and goes back into the forest. This looks interesting!

THE STRANGER. Who is it?

THE TEMPTER. See for yourself!

THE STRANGER (*peers out of the window*). That's she! . . . My first wife; my first love . . .

THE TEMPTER. Who seems to have deserted even her second husband . . . who arrives here with number three, who, judging from certain movements of the back and legs, wants to cause a stormy scene . . . Yes! Yes! But she does not seem to be aware of his intention. That was highly amusing! . . . I'll hide inside and listen! (*He disappears.*)

(THE FIRST WIFE *knocks.*)

THE STRANGER. Come in!

(THE FIRST WIFE *enters. Silence.*)

THE FIRST WIFE (*agitated*). I want to rent a house . . .

THE STRANGER. I beg your pardon!

THE FIRST WIFE (*hesitating*). If I had known, with whom I was to deal this would not have happened!

THE STRANGER. What difference does it make?

THE FIRST WIFE. May I sit down for a moment? I'm very tired.

THE STRANGER. Certainly!

(*They sit down at the table, opposite one another, at the same places which* THE STRANGER *and* THE LADY *occupied earlier in the scene.*)

THE STRANGER. It's a long time since we have sat opposite one another!

THE FIRST WIFE. With flowers and candles on the table . . . of an evening . . .

THE STRANGER. Both of us in our wedding clothes . . .

THE FIRST WIFE. And the flames of the candles stood still in devotion, and the flowers reflected . . .

THE STRANGER. Is your husband outside?

THE FIRST WIFE. No!

THE STRANGER. You are still seeking . . . what there is not?

THE FIRST WIFE. Isn't there?

THE STRANGER. No! And I always told you so! But you would never believe me; always, you wanted to find out for yourself! . . . Have you found out yet?

THE FIRST WIFE. Not yet!

THE STRANGER. Why did you leave your husband? (*Silence.*) Did he strike you?

THE FIRST WIFE. Yes!

THE STRANGER. Why did he do that?

THE FIRST WIFE. He was wicked!

THE STRANGER. Why was he wicked?

THE FIRST WIFE. For no reason at all!

THE STRANGER. Why was he wicked for no reason at all?

THE FIRST WIFE (*rises*). No, thank you; I don't propose to sit here and allow myself to be catechised!—Where is your wife?

THE STRANGER. She has just gone away!

THE FIRST WIFE. Why?

THE STRANGER. Why did you go away from me?

THE FIRST WIFE. Because I had an idea that you intended to leave me; in order not to appear deserted, I went away myself!

THE STRANGER. So that was it! But how could you have known my thoughts?

THE FIRST WIFE (*sits down again*). How? We never had to converse with one another to know each other's thoughts.

THE STRANGER. But we made a mistake in accusing each other of wicked thoughts, before they became actual; instead of living in reality, we lived in our imaginations, which, for the most part, betrayed us . . . Once, I saw, for example, how you welcomed with pleasure the glances of a stranger, and I accused you of being unfaithful.

THE FIRST WIFE. You were wrong and you were right, because my thoughts *were* sinful.

THE STRANGER. Don't you think my habit of anticipating you prevented you from completing your evil plans?

THE FIRST WIFE. Let me think . . . Yes, that's the way it was! But in my anger at having a spy continually at my side, who watched my inner life, a life which really belonged to me alone . . .

THE STRANGER. No, it wasn't yours alone; it was ours . . .

THE FIRST WIFE. Yes!—But I considered it mine, and that

you had no right to penetrate it! And when you did, I hated you; and in self-defence, I called you morbidly distrustful . . . *Now* I can tell the truth! Your suspicions were never wrong! Your overwhelming distrust was really nothing more than over-sagaciousness!

THE STRANGER. Oh!—Do you know, there were nights when we said goodnight to each other as friends and fell asleep, when I would wake up and feel as if your hate had sprayed a poison over me; then I wondered whether I should get up to save myself from suffocation . . . One night I woke up and felt a pressure on my head . . . I saw that you were awake and were holding your hand near my mouth . . . I thought that you were pouring poison down my throat from a flask, and in order to be sure, I grasped your hand!

THE FIRST WIFE. I remember!

THE STRANGER. Then what did you do?

THE FIRST WIFE. Nothing! I only hated you!

THE STRANGER. Why did you hate me?

THE FIRST WIFE. Because you were my husband! Because I ate of your bread!

THE STRANGER. Do you think it is always like that?

THE FIRST WIFE. I don't know; I suppose so!

THE STRANGER. But you often scorned me, too!

THE FIRST WIFE. Yes, when you were ridiculous! And a man in love with himself is always funny—Do you know what a fop is?—A man in love with himself! Like a cock!

THE STRANGER. But if every man who loves you women is ridiculous, how does it happen that you love again and again?

THE FIRST WIFE. We don't exactly. We endure the man—and look for another, who does not love us!

THE STRANGER. But when that one begins to love you, then you look for still a third?

THE FIRST WIFE. Perhaps.

THE STRANGER. Curious! (*Silence.*) I remember you always roamed about looking for something that you called a toreador, and that I translated as a horse-butcher! Finally, you got your toreador; he gave you no children and no bread—only beat you! . . . (*Silence.*) Once I allowed myself to be deluded into competing with the toreador. I began to ride, to fence, and to occupy myself with similar sports. You immediately developed an aversion for me! Moral: The husband may not do what the lover does! . . . Later you languished

for a troubador! . . . Who sat on the carpet and recited bad verses . . . my excellent verses were not good enough! . . . Have you gotten your troubador yet?

THE FIRST WIFE. Yes, but his verses are not bad!

THE STRANGER. On the contrary. Because I know him! And he borrowed my rhythms and used them for a barrel-organ.

THE FIRST WIFE (*rises and goes to the door*). You should be ashamed of yourself!

THE TEMPTER (*comes to the door with a letter in his hand*). A letter! for Mrs . . . (*Hands the letter.* THE FIRST WIFE *reads the letter and falls down on a chair.*) A farewell letter! Yes! All beginnings are difficult—in affairs of the heart! . . . And whoever does not have the patience to overcome the difficulties at the beginning, is deprived of the golden fruit! Troubadors are always impatient!—Young man, have you had enough by this time?

THE STRANGER (*rises; takes his hat*). Poor Anna!

THE FIRST WIFE. Don't leave me!

THE STRANGER. But I must!

THE FIRST WIFE. Don't leave me! You were really the best of them all!

THE TEMPTER. Perhaps you two would like to begin all over again? It would be one sure way to end it all, if the *finis* to the tale were written here. Because, if you have only one another, you will lose each other! . . . What is love, after all? Let each of us say something to the point, from our experience, before we separate!

THE FIRST WIFE. I don't know what it is. The noblest and the most beautiful is the most humiliating and the ugliest!

THE STRANGER. A caricature of holy love.

THE TEMPTER. A one-year-old plant which blooms with the betrothal, sprouts seeds with the wedding, and then bends down to the earth to wither and die!

THE FIRST WIFE. The loveliest flowers produce no seeds! The rose is the flower of love!

THE STRANGER. The lily, the flower of innocence. It can produce seeds, but prefers to open its white chalice to receive kisses only!

THE TEMPTER. And, therefore, propagates by producing buds, out of which come new lilies, like the chaste Minerva who sprang complete and perfect from the head of Zeus, instead of

from his kingly loins! . . . Yes, child, I have met with much in my life, but I have never been able to understand what the love of the soul has . . . (*He hesitates.*)

THE STRANGER. Say it!

THE TEMPTER . . . what the mightiest love, which is a wedding of souls, has to do with propagation!

THE STRANGER AND THE FIRST WIFE. There, he has said it!

THE TEMPTER. I have never been able to understand how an embrace, which is an unborn word, a mute speech, a silent utterance of the soul, a holy act— can be exchanged for a surgical operation which always ends in tears and trembling! I have never been able to comprehend how the holy night, the first, in which two souls join in the caress of love—can end in blood, quarrels, hate, mutual contempt—and lint. (*He claps his hand over his mouth.*)

THE STRANGER. If that were true of the fall of man . . "With grief shall you bear children . . ."

THE TEMPTER. Yes, then one might be able to understand . . .

THE FIRST WIFE. Who is this man?

THE TEMPTER. Only a wanderer on the quicksands of life!

THE FIRST WIFE (*rises*). Ready to go? . . . Who goes first?

THE STRANGER. I!

THE TEMPTER. Where?

THE STRANGER. Up there! And you?

THE TEMPTER. I'll remain here below, in between . . .

CURTAIN

ACT IV.

SCENE I. *The Chapter-Room of the Cloister*

(*The chapter-room in Gothic style. In the background, arcades open on to the cross-lode and the courtyard of the cloister. In the middle of the courtyard is a fountain, with a statue of the Virgin Mary, encircled by tall white roses. Fastened to the walls of the room are seats of oak. The chair of* THE PRIOR *is to the right, in the middle, and somewhat elevated. In the center of the room is an*

enormous crucifix. The sun shines on the statue in the courtyard.)

(THE STRANGER *comes out of the background; he wears a coarse black cowl, fastened with a cord around his body, and sandals on his feet. He remains standing at the door, considering the room; then he walks toward the crucifix and remains standing in front of it.*

The last strophe of a church-hymn can be heard from the other side of the courtyard.)

THE CONFESSOR (*comes out of the background; he is dressed in black and white, has long hair and a long beard, and a very small tonsure which can hardly be seen*). Peace be with you!

THE STRANGER. And with you!

THE CONFESSOR. And how do you find the white house?

THE STRANGER. I still see only the black . . .

THE CONFESSOR. Because *you* are still black . . . but you will become white, so white!—Did you sleep well last night?

THE STRANGER. Like a tired child, without dreaming . . . But tell me, why are there so many closed doors?

THE CONFESSOR. You will gradually learn how to open them.

THE STRANGER. Is it a very large building?

THE CONFESSOR. Endless! It dates from the time of Charlemagne, it has grown uninterruptedly by means of various worthy endowments; untroubled by the spiritual storms and changes of the various epochs, it stands on its rock cliff as a monument to occidental culture, that is, a welding of Christian religion with the wisdom of Greece and Rome.

THE STRANGER. Then this is not a purely religious institution?

THE CONFESSOR. Knowledge and all the fine arts; libraries and museums, observatories and laboratories—which you will see later. Agriculture and horticulture, a hospital, private sulphur springs . . .

THE STRANGER. Before the chapter comes in!—Who is the prior?

THE CONFESSOR (*smiles*). And such a prior! . . . Unique, incomparable, the most learned of men, and . . . you'll soon see him!

THE STRANGER. Is it true that he is very old?

THE CONFESSOR. Very, very old . . . he was born at

the beginning of this century, a century which is almost finished . . .

THE STRANGER. But he hasn't been in the cloister all that time . . . ?

THE CONFESSOR. Not always a monk, but always in some holy capacity . . . He was once a minister . . . that was seventy years ago; twice, he was curator of the university, archbishop . . . Sh! The mass is over!

THE STRANGER. And the fathers, the *patres*?

THE CONFESSOR. Wise men, wonderful beings, each different from the other . . .

THE STRANGER. Who have never lived outside in the world . . . ?

THE CONFESSOR. On the contrary, they have all lived outside, and more than once they have suffered shipwrecks, begun again, have run aground again, only to sail on once more . . . Wait!

THE STRANGER. The prior will sound me out . . . But don't think for a moment that I'm going to agree to everything he says . . .

THE CONFESSOR. Naturally not; you should express your own views, and defend them to the utmost!

THE STRANGER. Then they tolerate contradictions here?

THE CONFESSOR. Here? You're a child, and you've lived in a child's world, playing with thoughts and words! You've labored under the mistaken belief that language, a thing so material, could become a dress for something as subtle as a feeling or a thought. We, here, have discovered that mistake and speak as little as possible, because we see and sense what is inside; we have so trained our perceptions, through spiritual exercise, that we form a single chain and experience a feeling of joy and harmony, when perfect accord prevails. The prior, who has developed this faculty to the highest degree, can immediately detect when anyone's thoughts are taking the wrong direction; he is like—and it is an apt simile—like the needle of a galvanometer, which telegraph-engineers employ to determine when and where in the transmission a break occurred. Hence, we have no secrets from one another, and so confession is unnecessary. Remember that when you stand before the prior.

THE STRANGER. Am I to be examined?

THE CONFESSOR. Oh, no! Only the usual minor questions, which generally precede the practical examinations

. . . Be quiet now; they are coming! (*He steps to one side.*)

(THE PRIOR *comes out of the background; he is dressed entirely in white, his white cowl raised. He is a very old man, with long white hair, and a long white beard (like the head of Zeus). His face is pale, but full, and without wrinkles. His eyes are large, surrounded by shadows, the eyebrows unusually heavy. A quiet, majestic calm pervades his whole person.*

THE PRIOR *is followed by twelve Fathers, dressed in black and white, with black cowls, which are raised.*

All kneel before the crucifix and then go to their places.)

THE PRIOR (*after considering* THE STRANGER *for a moment*). What do you seek here?

(THE STRANGER, *confused, gropes for an answer but finds none.*)

THE PRIOR (*gently, indulgently, yet impressively*). Peace! Isn't that so?

(THE STRANGER *makes an affirmative sign.*)

THE PRIOR. But if all of life is a struggle, how can you find peace among the living? (THE STRANGER *is unable to reply.*) You want to turn your back to life, because you don't know how to deal with it, perhaps feel cheated by it?

THE STRANGER (*faintly*). Yes!

THE PRIOR. Cheated, maltreated! And this injustice began so early in your youth that you, like an innocent child, could not imagine that perhaps you had committed some cime which merited punishment!—Once you were unjustly accused of stealing fruit, tormented into confessing that you took the fruit, tortured into deceiving even yourself and begging forgiveness for a crime which you had not committed! Was it not so?

THE STRANGER (*distinctly*). It was!

THE PRIOR. It was so, and you have never been able to forget it! Never! Listen to this! No doubt you have a good memory; do you recall the "Swiss Family Robinson?"

THE STRANGER (*shrinks away*). The "Swiss Family—Robinson?"

THE PRIOR. Yes! . . . The story of your misery begins in 1857, but on Christmas of 1856, a whole year before that, you tore to pieces a copy of the "Swiss Family Robinson" and, fearing the punishment which might result if your act were

discovered, you hid it behind a cupboard in the kitchen . . .

(THE STRANGER *is terrified.*)

The cupboard was painted to resemble oak, and dresses hung in the upper compartment, shoes stood in the lower. The cupboard seemed unusually large to you for you were a little child, and you could not conceive of it ever being moved . . . Yet the cupboard *could* be moved, and at Easter cleaning, the concealed was discovered. The fear of being punished drove you to put the blame on one of your comrades! Consequently, he had to endure the punishment which should have been yours, because his character and appearance spoke against him, while you were believed by everyone . . . After this, the story of your misery follows as a logical consequence. Do you recognize the logic in it?

THE STRANGER. Yes, punish me!

THE PRIOR. No, I am no punisher, and I, as a child, did similar things . . . But now you will promise, for all time, to forget the story of your suffering and never to speak of it again?

THE STRANGER. I promise! If only the wronged one can forgive me!

THE PRIOR. He has already done that! Isn't that true, Father Isidor?

FATHER ISIDOR [the Doctor of *To Damascus*, Part I] *rises*). From the bottom of my heart!

THE STRANGER. You are he?

FATHER ISIDOR. I am!

THE PRIOR (*to* FATHER ISIDOR). Father Isidor, say another word—only one!

FATHER ISIDOR. It was in the year 1856 that I experienced these tortures! But two years before, in 1854, one of my brothers had endured the same suffering as a result of a false accusation on my part . . . (*to* THE STRANGER) Consequently, we are all guilty, and no one of us is innocent; I happen to know, too, that my victim had no clear conscience! (*He sits down*).

THE PRIOR. If we wanted to balance accounts against one another, we would find that we were all guilty, for we were all born in sin, all sons of Adam, the first sinner! . . . Yet (*to* THE STRANGER) you wanted to know something, didn't you?

THE STRANGER. I wanted to know the innermost meaning of life!

THE PRIOR. The innermost meaning of life? Then you want to know what no one may know! Father Uriel!

(FATHER URIEL, *blind, rises.*)

THE PRIOR (*to* THE STRANGER). See this blind Father! We call him Uriel in memory of Uriel Acosta, of whom you perhaps know? (THE STRANGER *makes a negative gesture.*) You don't? All young people ought to know about him! Uriel Acosta was of Portuguese-Jewish descent, but was reared in the teachings of Christ. Like all young men, at the usual age, he began to enquire—you understand—to enquire whether Christ was really God, with the result that he turned to Jewish teachings. After that, he probed into Mosaic writings and into the immortality of the soul and was consequently turned over by the rabbis to the Christian priesthood for punishment. After a long time, he returned once again to the synagogue and to Judaism. But his curiosity knew no bounds, and he continued his inquiries, until he stood before the silence of the void, and, in despair of ever learning the innermost secret of all things, he shot himself . . . Here you see our good Father Uriel! Once he was very young and wanted to know; always he yearned to stand at the head of modern movements and to discover newworld-philosophies. Incidentally, he is a friend of my youth and almost as old as I am . . . About 1820, he revived the so-called philosophy of enlightenment, which had lain dormant in its grave for twenty years. Through this philosophy, which pretended to be a universal Theodoric, one could open all locks, answer all questions, and overcome all adversaries—everything was so clear and simple! Uriel, at that time, was a determined opponent of all religions and persecuted, in particular, the adherents of mesmerism, as hypnotism was then known. In 1830, our friend became a Hegelian, somewhate late to be sure. Then he found God again, but God in Nature and in Man, and discovered himself to be a god in miniature. But unfortunately it happened that there were two Hegels, just as there are two Voltaires, and the later, or the conservative Hegel, evolved his divinity out of a compromise with Christianity. So Father Uriel, who refused to be left behind, became a rationalistic Christian, to whom fell the thankless task of opposing both rationalism and himself. But I will cut short this long, painful story, because of Father Uriel. In 1850, he again became a materialist and an enemy of Christianity. In 1870, he became a hypnotist, in 1880, a theosophist, and, in 1890, he proposed to shoot himself. That was

when I found him again. He was sitting on a bench on *Unter den Linden* in Berlin and was blind. Blind, this Uriel—Uriel means, "God is my light"—who for a hundred years advanced at the head of all contemporary movements with the torch of enlightenment in his hand! (*To* THE STRANGER). You see, he wanted to know, but could not! And because of that, he now believes! . . . Do you still want to know something?

THE STRANGER. I only want to ask one question!

THE PRIOR. Speak!

THE STRANGER. If Father Uriel had adhered to his first belief of 1810, people would have called him conservative and old-fashioned; but now, although he has devotedly followed all of the new developments of his time, the people say that he has deserted his colours. In other words, no matter what he does, people censure him.

THE PRIOR. Does it matter a great deal what people say? . . . Father Clemens, may I relate how grieved you always were by what people said about you?

(FATHER CLEMENS *rises and makes an affirmative sign.*) Father Clemens is our greatest portrait-painter . . . Out in the world he is known by another name, and a very celebrated one at that! . . . Father Clemens was young in 1830. He discovered a talent for painting and gave his entire soul to it. From the time he was twenty, he exhibited his work. Public, critics, teachers, and parents were as one in agreeing that he had erred in his calling . . . and the young Clemens was troubled by what people said, lost faith in his abilities and became a printer. When he was fifty, and his life lay behind him, a stranger began to hunt for the paintings of his youth, and then public, critics, teachers, and relatives hailed them as the works of a master! . . . But it was too late! When Father Clemens complained of the hypocrisy of the world, the world replied with a heartless sneer: "Why did you allow yourself to be hoaxed?" After that, Father Clemens grieved so much that he came to us. But now he grieves no longer! Or do you still, Father Clemens?

FATHER CLEMENS. No! But the story is not over yet. My 1830 paintings hung in a museum until 1880, acclaimed by all. Then taste changed quickly, and one day there appeared in a prominent newspaper a notice stating that my paintings were a disgrace to any museum. So they were stored away!

THE PRIOR (*to* THE STRANGER). There's a story for you!

FATHER CLEMENS. But it isn't over *yet*! . . . By 1890, taste had altered again to such an extent that a professor in the Academy of Fine Arts wrote that it was a shame for the nation to have allowed my paintings to be stored away! Once more they were hung up, and at this moment, are regarded as classics. How long will that last? . . . So you see, young man, wherein wordly glory consists! *Vanitas vanitatum vanitas.*

THE STRANGER. Then is life worthwhile?

THE PRIOR. Ask Father Melcher, who has probed, not only the deceptions and the illusions of the world, but the errors, the falsities and the contradictions as well. Follow him! He will show you the picture-gallery and tell you tales!

THE STRANGER. Whoever can teach me anything, I follow willingly!

(FATHER MELCHER *leads* THE STRANGER *by the hand out of the room.*)

SCENE II. *Picture-Gallery of the Cloister*

(*A picture-gallery in the cloister; portraits, for the most part, but all with two heads.*)

FATHER MELCHER. Well, then, first a little landscape by an unknown master . . . the title, "The Two Towers." Perhaps you have been in Switzerland and have seen the original?

THE STRANGER. I have been in Switzerland!

FATHER MELCHER. So! At the Amsteg station, on the Gotthard line, you have probably seen a tower called the castle of Zwing-Uri; it is celebrated by Schiller in "Wilhelm Tell." It stands there as a monument to the inhuman oppression which the inhabitants of Uri suffered at the hands of the German Kaiser! Lovely! On the Italian side of the Saint Gotthard lies the station of Bellinzona, as you know. There are many towers there, but the most remarkable is the Castel d'Uri. It is a monument to the inhuman oppression which the Italian canton suffered at the hands of the inhabitants of Uri. Do you understand?

THE STRANGER. Liberty! Liberty, give us, in order that we may suppress. That is something that I have never met with before!

FATHER MELCHER. That is as may be; we won't discuss the point. Let us now go over the collection of portraits!—Number one in the catalog. Boccaccio, with two heads; all of our por-

traits have at least two heads. The story is familiar! The great man began his career by writing lewd and irreligious novels, which he dedicated to Queen Johanna of Naples, who had led astray the son of the holy Brigittine. Boccaccio spent the remainder of his life as a saint in a cloister and gave lectures on Dante's hell and the devils, whom, in his youth, he had thought himself able to drive out in a most unusual way. You observe, how the two faces confront each other now!

THE STRANGER. Yes! But that touch of humour, one might expect to find in a man of such self-perception as our friend Boccaccio, is missing.

FATHER MELCHER. Number two in the catalog. Yes, that is the two-headed Doctor Luther. The young champion of tolerance, the aged champion of intolerance! Is that enough?

THE STRANGER. Quite!

FATHER MELCHER. Number three in the catalog. The great Gustavus Adolphus takes Catholic money from the Cardinal in order to fight for Protestantism, while he remains neutral in regard to the Catholic Alliance.

THE STRANGER. And how do the Protestants explain this three-sided contradiction?

FATHER MELCHER. They say it is a lie!—Number four in the catalog. Schiller, creator of "Die Räuber," made an honorary citizen of Paris, in 1792, by the men of the French Revolution; in 1790, already aulic councillor in Meiningen, and in 1791, a scholar under the patronage of the king of Denmark. . . . This scene depicts the councillor—and the friend of his excellency, Goethe—as he received, much later in the year 1798, the diploma of honour from the men of the French Revolution—a diploma of the Reign of Terror of 1798, when the Revolution, in the hands of the Directorate, was at end! I should have liked to see the councillor and his friend, his excellency, at that time!—But it doesn't matter, because two years later, in 1800, he acknowledged his nomination with "Die Glocke," in which he thanked and begged the revolutionists to make peace.—Yes, such is life! But it doesn't matter! *We* are enlightened people and we are like "Die Räuber" as well as "Die Glocke," like Schiller as well as Goethe.

THE STRANGER. The work endures, the master perishes!

FATHER MELCHER. Goethe, yes! Number five in the catalog. Began with the Strassburg cathedral and "Götz von Berlichingen," two calls to arms of Gothic-Germanic art against

that of Greece and Rome (in other words, a repudiation of antiquity). Later he fought against Germanism and defended Classicism. Goethe against Goethe! The traditional peace of the gods, the harmony, the all-pervasive calm in the chaos of one's self. But the chaos became oppression, when the romantic school appeared, and attacked Goethe's "Iphigenie" with Goethe's Götz-theories. That the great "pagan" ends his work by converting Faust, in the second part, and by having him saved by the Virgin Mary and the angels, is usually overlooked by his admirers. And the fact, too, that the "glass-transparent" Goethe, toward the end of his life, finds everything so "unusual," so "strange," even the simplest and most obvious things, which earlier he had been able to fathom effortlessly. His last request was accordingly: "More light!" Yes, yes!—But it doesn't matter! We are enlightened and we love our Goethe, notwithstanding.

THE STRANGER. And rightly so!

FATHER MELCHER. Number six in the catalog. Voltaire! He has more than two heads! . . . The godless one who devotes his whole life to defending God! The scoffer who was derided because "like a child he believed in God." The creator of the cynical Candide, who sings:

"Wollust in der Jugend Frische,
Sucht' ich deine Süssigkeit;
Deine, leere, trügerische
Süsse ward zu Bitterkeit.
Schliesslich an des Alters Tische
Fand ich deine Eitelkeit."*

Doctor Know-It-All, who with the application of reason and science, thought himself able to grasp everything between heaven and earth, sings in the last verse:

"Kenntiswelten zu durchjagen,
Geistesgrösse sich verzeiht,
Maulwörfsblick war dreist, zu fragen,
Ob ihr, Himmel, messbar seid!—
Was ich weiss, kann mich nur plagen:
Kenntnis ist nur Eitelkeit."*

But it doesn't matter! Voltaire may be utilized in many ways!

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*The translator has been unable to place the Voltaire quotation, nor has he been able to render either the Swedish translation or the German translation into English verse of the same metres and rhyme-schemes. As a consequence, the German translation (by Emil Schering), rather than the Swedish translation of Voltaire's verse, has been utilized, as being more accessible to the English reader of Strindberg than the Swedish might be.

The Jews employ him in their tirades against Christ, and the Christians, in theirs against the Jews, because he was an anti-Semite like Luther! Chateaubriand made use of him for Catholicism, and the Protestants, even today, employ him in their attacks on Catholicism! He was a jolly man!

THE STRANGER. What is your opinion of him?

FATHER MELCHER. Here we have no opinions; we have beliefs, as I have already told you! That is why we have only one head; and it is situated directly above our hearts! . . . Meanwhile, let us turn to number seven in the catalog. Yes, that is Napoleon!—The Revolution's own creation! The emperor of the people, the Nero of Liberty, the oppressor of Equality and the "big brother" of Fraternity. But he is the most cunning of the two-headed, because he could smile at himself, surmount his failures, skin himself alive, change his soul, and in the course of each transformation, remain conscious, as in a reincarnation, fully convinced, and justified to himself!—There is only one man who can be compared to him in this respect. That is the Dane, Kierkegaard. He was, from the beginning, conscious of the parthenogenesis of the soul, and its capacity for conceiving immaculately, even during the lifetime, by means of grafting small cuttings. Hence in order not to become the fool of life, he wrote under a series of pseudonyms, each of which signified one of the "trials on the road of life." But you must know! The divine Master made a fool of him, despite all his precautions. Kierkegaard, who had fought all his life against the priesthood, was finally compelled by misery to become a member of it! Yes, yes! Such things can happen!

THE STRANGER. The powerful play the buffoon . . .

FATHER MELCHER. The powerful play the buffoon with buffoons and mock the proud, particularly those who maintain that they alone possess truth and wisdom! . . . Number eight in the catalog. Victor Hugo. Divides himself endlessly. Peer of France, grandee of Spain, friends of kings, socialistic editor of "The Unfortunate Children of Society." The peers naturally call him a rebel, and the socialists, a reformer.—Number nine. Count Frederick Leopold of Stollberg. Wrote a fanatical book upholding Protestantism, and then suddenly turned Catholic! Unexplainable on the part of a brilliant man! A wonder, isn't it? A little journey to Damascus perhaps?—Number ten. LaFayette. The apostle of liberty, the revolutionist. Had to leave France, condemned as a reactionary,

because he wanted to aid Louis XVI, was seized by the Austrians and brought to Olmütz as a revolutionist! What was he?

THE STRANGER. Both!

FATHER MELCHER. Yes! Both, both sides, which make the whole—the whole man!—Number eleven. Bismarck. The paradox! The honest diplomat who maintained that he had discovered that a statement of truth was always the greatest ruse. Was forced to spend the last six years of his life enmasking himself as a confirmed liar.—You are tired! We will stop now!

THE STRANGER. Yes, friend; one entertains the same thoughts his whole life long, clings firmly to the same opinions, grows old in accordance with the order of Nature, becomes conservative, old-fashioned, is called unprogressive; and one obeys the laws of evolution, strides forward with his times, renews himself through the always-young impulses of the Temper of the Times, and then is called wavering and faithless.

FATHER MELCHER. That is as old as the world! But does a sensible man care what he is called? What one is, in the making, that one is!

THE STRANGER. Then who expresses the periodic, always-changing-its-views *Zeitgeist*.

FATHER MELCHER. That you must really answer for yourself, and as follows: The *Zeitgeist* is defined by the powers which apparently develop themselves in circles . . . Hegel, the philosopher of the present, dimorph, because we swear by a conservative Hegel and by a radical Hegel, has best cleared up the contradictions of life, of history, that is, with his magic-formula: Thesis, to affirm; antithesis, to negate; synthesis, to mold into one! . . . Young man, comparatively speaking young man! You have begun life by affirming everything; then you proceeded to deny everything, as a matter of principle. Terminate your life now by synthesizing! In other words, don't pretend to be exclusive, radical, unique! don't say: either . . . or; but, as well this . . . as that! In a word: Humanity and Humility!

SCENE III. *The Chapel of the Cloister*

(*In the choir of the chapel. Therein, an open coffin with pall; a burning candle on either side of the coffin.*

THE CONFESSOR *leads in* THE STRANGER *by the hand.* THE STRANGER *is dressed in the white shirt of a novice.*)

THE CONFESSOR. Have you thoroughly considered the step which you are about to take?

THE STRANGER. Thoroughly!

THE CONFESSOR. Have you nothing further to ask?

THE STRANGER. Questions? None!

THE CONFESSOR. Then wait here, while I fetch the chapter, and the Fathers and Brothers, so that we may begin the solemn proceedings.

THE STRANGER. So be it!

(THE CONFESSOR *goes*. THE STRANGER, *alone*, *meditates*.)

THE TEMPTER (*steps forward*). Prepared?

THE STRANGER. So prepared that I have no answer left for you.

THE TEMPTER. At the brink of the grave, I perceive. You will lay yourself in the coffin, and to all appearances, die; the old man will have three shovels of earth ready, and someone will sing the *De Profundis*. Then you will arise from the dead, your old name will be discarded, and you will be baptized again, like a new-born babe!—What will you be called? (THE STRANGER *does not reply*.)

THE TEMPTER: It is written: John, Brother John, because he preached in the wilderness and . . .

THE STRANGER. Don't disturb me!

THE TEMPTER. Talk to me a little first, before you enter the long silence; then you may not speak for a whole year!

THE STRANGER. All the better! Speaking, in the last analysis, is a vice, like drinking; and why speak, when the word can never give body to the thought?

THE TEMPTER. You, who are on the brink of the grave—was life so bitter?

THE STRANGER. Yes, *my* life!

THE TEMPTER. You have never had any joy?

THE STRANGER. On the contrary, many joys, but they were so shortlived, and they seemed to come only in order that the sorrow of regret should be the sharper!

THE TEMPTER. Isn't the reverse true—that sorrow came in order to enhance joy?

THE STRANGER. Put it any way you wish . . .

(*A woman, with a baptized child, passes across the stage.*)

THE TEMPTER. See, there is a little mortal, destined to suffer!

THE STRANGER. Poor child!

THE TEMPTER. The first chapter in the history of a man. (*A pair of newly-weds cross the stage.*) And there—the loveliest—the bitterest! Adam and Eve in Paradise, in eight days in Hell, in fourteen, once more in paradise . . .

THE STRANGER. The loveliest! The most illuminating! . . . The first, the only, the last thing that gives value to life! . . . Once I sat in the sun—a spring day, on a veranda—under the first green tree, and a little halo crowned a head, and a white veil lay like a faint morning—mist over a face, which was not that of a human being . . . Then darkness came! . . .

THE TEMPTER. Where from?

THE STRANGER. From the light itself! . . . If not from the light then I don't know!

THE TEMPTER. It must have been a shadow, because a shadow requires light, while darkness . . .

THE STRANGER. Stop! Or we will never come to the end!

(THE CONFESSOR *and* THE CHAPTER *appear in procession.*)

THE TEMPTER. Goodbye! (*He disappears.*)

THE CONFESSOR (*with a large black pall*). God, give him eternal peace!

THE CHOIR. And may the everlasting light shine upon him!

THE CONFESSOR (*wraps* THE STRANGER *in the pall*). May he rest in peace!

THE CHOIR. Amen!

END OF PART III

DEATH

BY LEWIS COLWELL

One long last pull
On oars worn thin with plying—
A blur of blue—
Then light which glisteneth—

The music of
A freed star's silver sighing,
Glad in a task fulfilled—
Can this be death?

A PRAYER

By Francis Jammes

(*Translated from the French by John Heard*)

O God, when comes the hour when I shall go to Thee
Grant that the sun may shine, and that the air may be
Full of bright sun-dust. Then, as in this world I've done,
I'll choose the road to Heaven I like the best—that one
On which alway the little stars wink gently down.
I'll take my stick and walk along the white highway
And to all donkeys, those good friends of mine, I'll say:
"I'm Francis Jammes; I'm starting out for Heaven to-day
Because I'm sure that in God's country there can be
No room for any Hell. So come along with me,
You little friends of mine who love the bright blue sky:
Poor, humble beasties who flick off a pestering fly
Or a stinging wasp, or who accept an unkind blow
With patient, flapping ears and with your heads hung low."

Surrounded by these small gray friends I'd come to Thee
Because I've loved them much, and very tenderly;
The lowly hanging heads; the little feet close set
When they have stopped—so gently set, your heart is torn!
I wish to reach the long road's end while followed yet
By an hundred soft gray ears, by backs that oft have born
Great wicker baskets, and by legs that patiently have drawn
Mountebanks' wagons to the fair in th'early dawn;
Or peddlers' carts, or wandering tinkers' jangling store;
By flanks much bruised by heavy tanks of tin.
So would I come to Thee, with asses great with foal
That walk unsteadily; and I would reach my goal
Surrounded by those friends whose legs are all wrapped in
Old rags to shield blue, festering sores from swarming flies
That settle round the rims in hungry ecstasies.

Grant Thou, dear God, that so I'll come to Thee; and may,
In Thy great peace, Thy blessed angels on that day
Lead me and all my donkeys to some peaceful stream

With banks deep in sweet grass, and cherries overhead—
Cherries as soft and cool and smooth as in a dream
We feel a young girl's skin.
When thither I am led
Into that haven of men's souls, grant Thou, I pray,
That by that quick, cool brook I may be giv'n
The likeness of a gentle, patient donkey, too,
That I, with them all overlasting ages through,
May in humility repose me in Thy Heav'n.

AUGUST NIGHT

By Charles Ballard

I need the spell-rapt ears of dreams to hear
Moth-music, when the silken whir of wings
Is softer than wood-whispers—
Dream-spell, and such an August night
As comes but once a summer.

Just now the velvet leaves
Turned upward, questioning—but it was only
Faintest of stirrings, frailer than the mood
That quivers in the trees for a moment
Before the day's first silver.

Perfumes speak
Only in half-voice tonight,
And ivory petals float, and disappear
Into a blue-gray sea.

This is not the lush darkness
Of oriental gardens—rather
The pearl-veiled sorcery of western nights
That presses at my throat, and lays over my heart
Swift silence—
Such a night
As wraps me close in wonder like a prayer.

BELATED APPRECIATION

By Hoxie Neale Fairchild

The trouble with being a little girl is that when you try to tell grown-ups the truth about something they chuckle lovingly at you, instead of really paying attention. That has been the fate of Hilda Conkling. Critics, I know, have declared her to be a true poet quite irrespective of her years, but behind this serious praise one feels the adult hand uplifted to pat the braided hair of the child. A reviewer quotes the lines,

> March maple-sugar and September apples
> And a cave of honey the bees know,
> And Hilda to think about them afterwards,

as an example of the charming egotism of childhood. He is right; but had he only thought less of childhood and more of poetry he would have seen that these lines constitute a perfectly satisfactory account of the poetic process, not alone as it operates in Hilda, but as it operates in Chaucer and Wordsworth and Browning. We have here the existential stuff from which poetry arises—maple-sugar, apples, honey—and the creative mind which extracts significance from these things—Hilda to think about them. The little word "afterwards" means all that Wordsworth meant when he spoke of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity."

Shoes of the Wind is a much more self-conscious volume than *Poems by a Little Girl*. The author—let us use the term without so much as the flicker of a smile—has come to see that among the things there are in the world to wonder about must be included the strange impulse which makes the world wonderful. That is why, in this later collection, there are several poems which deal with the making of poetry, and besides these a number of stray references to the creative work of the imagination.

Technically speaking, few things are harder than to write poetry about the poetic process. Illusion cannot simultaneously be created and analyzed: the spectator hears the stage-hands whistling at their tasks behind the scenes. Hilda's best work is, therefore, in those pieces where she does not tell us what she is doing, but simply does it. Yet to the student of poetry her introspections are precious documents. This little girl is not a

wholly natural being. She is not the child of nature, but the child of Grace Hazard Conkling. Yet so far as the pure essence of poetry can be studied at all, it can be studied in Hilda's work. Although strong hereditary tendencies have helped to make her what she is, she has begun to write before the environmental influences of the twentieth century have had a chance to determine her reactions. Taine would be abashed in her presence, for she is the product of no *milieu* save the everlasting *milieu* of beauty and of love. When she speaks to us of poetry, we may be sure that she represents no log-rolling coterie, that she is reacting against no oppressive traditions of the past or shocking eccentricity of the present. Since her poetry is the nearest thing to pure natural poetry our generation is likely to see, her account of her art has a peculiar interest.

According to Hilda, it is all very simple:

> I know how poems come;
> They have wings.
> When you are not thinking of it
> I suddenly say
> 'Mother, a poem!'

There is no pose of inspiration here, but the frank report of one who entertains strange guests. Strange, for the simplicity of these visitations is after all a deeply mysterious simplicity. Quite unawares, the image of Pine Cone, "a brown girl from Kentucky," slips into her mind,

> But what made me think of her today
> I'll never know.

How things come gently out of the past, take a form almost tangibly real, and as gently melt away, is a question which pursues her.

> I think of your dark yellow hair
> Lifted by the wind . . .
> I can see it in my mind:
> It makes me wonder.
> How did I find you in my dreams?
> Where is the dream now?

Without realizing it, Hilda is telling us that she possesses that first requisite of the poet, the ability to retain sense-impressions. She comes very close to answering her own question in the lines,

When I shut my eyes
I see violets drawn on my eye-lids
From picking violets all day long.

When we close our eyes, we all continue to perceive, for a fleeting instant, what we have been observing. It is the poet's privilege to preserve this "after-image" in his subconsciousness, until some congruous thought or emotion calls it forth into consciousness again.

Not only the permanence and clarity of images, but their fusion with the heart and mind of the poet is of importance. These stored-up sense impressions enrich, and are in turn enriched by, the temperament in which they become imbedded. The Hermit Thrush, says Hilda,

. . . will fly away south,
But his song stays in the heart
Once it is heard.

The scent of flowers stimulates not merely her nostrils, but her mind:

Jasmine shining in the hair of Spring
And the scent of jasmine coming into my thoughts.

According to this youthful authority, then, poetry is the return to the mind, in all their original freshness, of past sense-impressions.

But poetry is more than that. To the reminiscent imagination which recalls past beauty must be added the creative imagination which makes new beauty out of old. And though we pass here from psychology to mystery, Hilda will help us to understand.

My sister stood on a hilltop
Looking toward the sea.
The wind was in her bronze-colored hair.
She was an image
On a broken wave . . .
Foam was at her feet.
So for a moment she wavered
And was lovely;
And I remember her.

This poet does not attempt to reproduce all the sights, sounds

and smells of a long afternoon's play on the cliffs. From all these hours, just one lovely instant—her sister poised in delicate equilibrium against the wind—is recognized as poetic material. All else is allowed to sink into oblivion. Rigorous selection of the significant is, perhaps, the first creative function of the imagination.

Many a modern poet would be content to represent as vividly as possible that "image on a broken wave," and go no further. Imagism might, indeed, be defined as the art of giving clarity and sharpness to carefully selected objective materials. But Hilda is seldom an imagist. Generally she not only describes the stimulus, but does something poetic to it. In *I Thought*, she enriches her view of the sea by adding to it the contents of her mind. She has seen the white film on honey, and she now sees the foam on the waves. Her imagination performs an act of synthesis, and she says:

> I thought the sea was honeycomb
> And all the waves were bees
> Humming cozily among the foam.

Then she lets her mind play with the notion of foaminess, and adds:

> I thought that white mulberry trees
> Shook their blossoms out all day
> In foam of honey, windy spray.

Thus Hilda has compared waves and honey, and then compared mulberry blossoms with both, making a sort of triangular metaphor. All this takes place in the mind; it is not poetry, but preparation for poetry:

> And then I made a song of these
> After I got home.

Ignorant of imagist doctrine, Hilda finds in creative imagination not only an element of selection but an element of combination. The former liberates the significant from the trivial; the latter fuses objective and subjective into an ideal structure, based upon, but transcending, the real.

The fact that figures of speech have been used by charlatans as mere decorative tinsel should not blind us to their real im-

portance in the building up of poetic illusion. Probably Hilda did not know what a metaphor is; yet *I Thought* is made of metaphor. She employs simile in the same natural way when she sees the Connecticut sweeping by the sand-dunes:

> So that I thought of all the queens I have ever known
> In all the stories.

"Swept by like a queen!" We have heard that before, and yet, in this context, it seems new and fresh. Could this illusion have been created without letting her immediate perceptions fuse with pictures already existing in her mind? Is it not this combination which makes the poem?

The fact that selection and synthesis constitute creative imagination may also be illustrated negatively: that is, by taking a finished poetic impression and decomposing it. Hilda does this for us:

> In my apple-orchard
> In the oldest tree
> Fall has hidden golden leaves.
> I looked into the hollow
> And saw no apples,
> Only leaves with frost on them
> Like marble tilings,
> Like jewelled tables . . .
> Yet there was no gold . . . no marble . . .
> Only leaves covered with frost
> That sparkled the way my thought told me.

The effect is like that obtained from running a moving picture film backwards. The association makes the poetry; the dissociation destroys it. This is a useful lesson for devotees of Goncourt, Joyce, Proust and Eliot.

"*That sparkled the way my thought told me.*" There is little poetry in that, but much critical insight. To speak of the poetic process as being set in motion by some objective stimulus is an inaccurate simplification of the facts. We do not go about barren of thought and feeling, until our emotions are titillated by a tree with a bird in it. What we feel influences what we see, quite as much as what we see influences what we feel. Things sparkle the way our thoughts tell us. Thus poetry is a complex interplay of forces between the life of nature and the mind of man. Hilda says so in *Song Nets:*

I run back and forth making my nets.
The seagulls scream . . .
Tell me where to catch the songs;
I have magic in my own mind
That tells me.

The elusive spirit of poetry is snared in the delicate meshes formed by the intersections of sight and thought.

The quality of poetry depends upon the temperament through which the poet looks upon life. That is why no unpoetical person can be taught how to write poetry. Teachers cannot equip their pupils with new souls. Hilda Conkling, more considerate than most poets, helps us to understand her work by giving us *The Key to My Mind.* In her mind, she says, is a little stone door, opened with a golden key.

The door is carved like lace.
Spirits fly in and out,
Messages
Of love and things I ought to know.
Through the lacework of stone
Comes a sweet melody saying:
Happiness . . . purity . . . strangeness.

To happy, pure and strange influences, then, the door swings open. Yet spirits fly not only in, but out. She would not react to happiness, purity and strangeness if her mind did not already have within it a disposition to see things zestfully, to purge away the imperfections of the real, and to shed upon nature the light that never was.

O Hilda, we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone doth nature live.

The poetic mind does not passively await stimulation, but externalizes itself in nature.

On the sands of the western sea
Are pink shells . . . bits of coral . . .
One lonesome shell
Holds my mind upon it
. . . . . .
I am that little shell.

Shells carry in their hearts the murmur of the sea. But this shell

has been imbued with Hilda's "happiness, purity, strangeness." She goes on:

> I hear waves break and fall away . . .
> They are echoes in my heart.
> They are stories I heard . . .
> Yesterday . . .
> Often I try to remember to tell you
> The words of their loveliness.

Surely this is eloquent of the interweaving of object and subject. But if we are to have poetry, this subtle work of the mind must be expressed in words. Though Hilda knows little of technique, she has already experienced the pangs of the artist.

> When moonlight strikes the water
> I cannot get it into my poem;
> I only hear the tinkle of ripplings of light.
> When I see the water's fingers and the moon's rays
> Intertwined,
> I think of all the words I love to hear,
> And try to find words white enough
> For such shining.

Melody in words; aptness in words— these are the goals of poetic expression; never attained, yet always to be striven for. Since this desire and this sense of frustration are found in the heart, the instinct for beautiful form is shown to be as fundamental as the instinct for beautiful content, and indeed not be extricated from it. The creed of the true poet is that he cannot claim to feel a thing as it should be felt until he can express his feeling as it should be expressed.

One of Amy Lowell's best poems ends with the question, "Christ! What are patterns for?" Although the patterns referred to are social conventions, it seems not unfair to extend the term to include the patterns of art. This question is perplexing. A poet is not, necessarily, a practitioner in the conventional forms. Yet in *Shoes of the Wind* this poet experiments charmingly with rhyme and metre. But whether it be in her own spontaneous rhythmic arrangements, or in her ventures into regular form, she shows a keen sense of design.

> A ring of hills . . . one river . . . some streets
> Make a design.
> Stars make a design
> And it is a Big Dipper

Or the Pleiades like a bunch of grapes . . .
It is harder to say what the roofs mean:
I don't know . . .
Maybe I'm not yet far enough
Away.

This ability to grasp and also to pass on patterns in nature is a part of the impulse to construct patterns of one's own in art. A poet wishes not only to express his feelings in words, but to arrange those words in a beautiful design. Observe, also, that Hilda has fallen upon just the right reason for being unable to "compose" those roofs over which she gazes at the stars. They are too close to her. And the delicate comprehension of that "yet"! A time will come later, she feels, when the true pattern of those roofs will

. . . flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.

Hilda nowhere illustrates the essence of the poetic mind more clearly than in her craving for perfection. She longs not only for better words and nobler form, but for a richer and more intelligent internal reaction. She knows that great poetry has a depth, breadth and height to which only a mature mind can attain. Once she rather pathetically concludes a poem by saying,

This is a picture-poem
But it is my thoughts, too.

The picture, as usual, has been charming; but from it no thought has emerged. Yet surely there is more promise in this desire to think, than in the modernistic expulsion of thought from the realm of poetry.

At present the obligation to bring intelligence to bear upon the pictures in her mind weighs rather heavily. Behind the lines, one feels and almost sees the wrinkled forehead and the puzzled smile.

Old as it may seem,
Tiresome as it gets to be to a young mind,
These two wonders, gold of the sun . . .
Blue of the sky and night . . .
Have to be thought about.

Yes, they have to be thought about. The time is soon coming when the poet will wish to do more than personify pansies. Not only the day and the night, but good and evil, love and hate, life and death, will occupy the mind. But if one holds fast to happiness, purity, strangeness, it will not be so very hard. If one keeps that magic in mind, all these perplexing things will fall into beautiful patterns. They will become the glowing stuff of poetry, and the poet's aim will be to find words white enough for such shining.

Meanwhile I am grateful for what has already been done; for the reminder that beneath all the bickering and hair-splitting and source-hunting of the learned world there still lies one great truth about poetry:

> Loveliness that dies when I forget
> Comes alive when I remember.

TO JOHN

On The First of His Birthdays

By Lewis Colwell

I would not ask for you,
As others will, much gold
And heaped up stores of fairy plunder.
Only one wish I have, that you may hold
Two gifts already yours—
Laughter and wonder.

Laughter you learned,
When on some mystic morn
You played with stars in some far paradise:
And wonder in your blossoming heart was born,
When blue-arc'd worlds
Were mirrored in your eyes.

Gold carried long
Becomes a wearying weight:
Laughter is light as silver star's caress,
And wonder, at each swinging wide
Of Dawn's white gate,
Keeps tryst with loveliness.

BROKEN PINES

By Charles Hilton

Cast of Characters

Christian Lundrude, *a farmer*
Amanda Lundrude, *his wife*
Sigard, *their son*
Eric Hansen
The Reverend Ames
Robert Hall, *Justice of the Peace*

Scene: *In the white-washed kitchen of the Lundrude farmhouse. There is a window in the kitchen and a door in the same wall. In the side wall there is a door which leads to another part of the house. Through the open door and window a background of mountains and hills is visible. The kitchen is a crude, bare, clean place. There is a large table to one side of the room. Near it, on the wall is a row of shelves covered with a green curtain. Near the window is placed a chair in which the grandfather may sit and look out at the fields and the mountains. The old man is in the chair, now, half-dozing. The farmer is standing in the doorway, looking out over the yellow fields. His wife is working at the table.*

Time: *Late in the afternoon, before milking.*

Christian. The oats are about ready to cut.

Amanda. They are late this year. It must have been the late rains held them back.

Christian. What does you know about it, by God!

Amanda. It yust seem so to me. The rain lasted late this year. It is not usual for them to last so late. The hens didn't hatch off the early chickens as early as they do other years. It yust seem so to me.

Christian. The hay didn't grow as good this year. Supposing you find a reason for that, too.

Amanda. Hay usually grows good with wet springtimes.

Christian. Well, the hay hasn't this year, by God, and that is yust one reason we are hard up for money now. Any coffee?

Amanda. The coffee pot isn't on the stove, but I'll put it on. (*She quits her work, finds the coffee pot behind the curtain, puts*

coffee in it and puts it on the stove.) Chris, you had some coffee yust an hour or, maybe, two hours ago.

CHRISTIAN. I has coffee when I wants it!

ERIC (*arousing from a doze with a start*). Coffee? Yah, yah, yah, put on the pot, Amanda, girl. Men has to have lots of coffee.

CHRISTIAN. The old man's woke up.

AMANDA (*to* ERIC). It's a lot of coffee you'll need. Bah!

CHRISTIAN (*turning into the kitchen*). How long will it be before the coffee's cooked.

AMANDA. It'll be a while, Chris, it yust ain't even had time to boil yet. This wood ain't any good, even in the summer time when it is dry.

ERIC. Ah, that yust remind me when I first come over . . .

AMANDA (*with impatient sharpness*). Yust you shut up now! You have told us about that a thousand times. This makes the tenth time today.

ERIC (*slinking down in his chair like a whipped dog*). Yah, yah, yah! maybe so I has.

CHRISTIAN (*suddenly*). Was it the postman that stopped here today? I yust thought I saw his car down the road this morning. I thought, might be, if it wus him, he came here. Did he leave anything? I couldn't see because I wus in the pasture and the God damned brush that grows along the fence wus between me and him.

ERIC (*trying to hear*). How, now? What was that you said . . .

AMANDA. Yes, it wus the postman. He . . .

ERIC (*catching the word*). Ah, yah, yah, the postman. He come.

AMANDA. Shut up! Shut up, now, I say! I am tired of you yust all the time sticking in. You always sticking in . . .

CHRISTIAN (*arousing to anger*). Here! Here, both of you! Shut up, by God! What I want to know is whether he bring that God damned check. (*Cooling down*). I got to have it to get the oats cut with.

AMANDA. It came.

ERIC (*bobbing up again*). Yah, yah. It came. Every time it come it remind me of the time, the time we stormed . . .

AMANDA (*turning on him fiercely*). Shut up, I say! What's the matter with yez, huh! Can't you hear anything?

CHRISTIAN. Here, here, that ain't important! Did he sign

it yet? We don't want the old man dying and leaving us with no money to get them oats cut with. This government business has got to be done yust to the letter, or nobody gets anything.

ERIC (*eagerly*). No. I hasn't signed yet. (*Rising stiffly and awkwardly from his chair.*) Get it for me and I'll sign now. (*Sinks back into the chair in pain.*) Uff—Oh!

AMANDA (*with contempt*). You yust playing off some more for sympathy, huh? Well, you won't get no sympathy from me. You're the worst man for sympathy. (*Drying her hands and looking behind the curtain at the shelves*). You wus some man to give it yourself, I guess. I can remember our mother out washing in the rain, and you yust too cussed lazy to build a porch for her to wash under. She worked and slaved all her life fer you and no sympathy did I hear you give her. You yust took your gun and your ax to the woods, and nothing was seen of you until it got time to eat again. (*With alarm*). I wonder if I could have lost it. (*Looks deeper into the shelf. This causes a general tension.*) Oh, here it is! Help him up, Chris, I found it now.

CHRISTIAN. You better put it in the vase on the top of the cupboard shelf next time. Then you'll know yust where it is. Ve yust can't loose that. (*He helps the old man over to the table. She brings the check.*)

ERIC (*pleased*). I see the check yust laughing at me. (*Takes the pen awkwardly*). I didn't do this this way once. I wus young and there wus not many smarter with the pen than I wus.

AMANDA (*irritated*). Yes, you see good, now, don't you! Why, you are blind as bats most of the time!

CHRISTIAN. Yes, blinder . . .

ERIC. I can see better at times than I yust can other times. That is so.

AMANDA. It yust all depend on what you want to see. (*They lead him back and place him in his chair by the window.*)

CHRISTIAN. I hasn't got time to stay here all day and wait for coffee. I'll get it when I comes back.

AMANDA. The coffee will be ready in yust a minute.

CHRISTIAN. I hasn't got time now.

AMANDA. But, Chris . . .

CHRISTIAN. I tell you I hasn't got time. I am going to the pasture for the cows. (*He goes out.*)

AMANDA. Chris. Chris. (*She goes to the door and looks out after him.*)

ERIC (*after a time*). What time is it?

AMANDA (*mockingly*.) You got great eyesight. Look at the clock for yourself.

ERIC. I can't see the clock. There is something that's like a fog that comes over my eyes. It wus gone a moment ago and they wus clear, clear as seas. But I can't see the clock now. Must be getting yust about time Sigard was coming home.

AMANDA (*looking at the clock*). Yes, he should be here now—even before this. He iss lazy, lazy as everything. He doesn't take much after the Lundrudes, nor any of my mother's people. He yust takes after your people. They are all lazy whelps like you wus yourself. You have a bad hold over that boy. You yust are the cause of him going off reading every chance he get instead of working in the fields with his father. (*The old man remains silent for a moment rubbing his hands together nervously and blinking at the shadows. The afternoon is waning.*) You make me nervous. Your hands yust go all the time. Why don't you be still? You, you . . . (*She goes to the shelves and takes some dishes from behind the curtain and places them on the table. The old man is silent, cowed*).

ERIC (*timidly*). Amanda?

AMANDA. What now?

ERIC. Don't you really love me any more. I am just your father that is old. I don't want to be so much trouble to you, Amanda, girl.

AMANDA. Why should I love you, yust you tell me why?

ERIC. I don't know. I—I yust hoped.

AMANDA. Well, don't hope. What with the chickens and everything, and this a wet year, too, there is yust about all I can manage without you trying to make it worse the way you does. There'll be the oats to harvest pretty soon now. You yust make no end of work.

ERIC. I suppose I do now. I suppose I do. But, Amanda?

AMANDA. Yes?

ERIC. Can I have just a little bit out of it—that pension check for Sigard? Can I? I promised him that I would, might be.

AMANDA. You yust don't dare touch that check! If you do—(*pause*) You tried to last time. Christian needs that to pay for the oats-cutting with. I'm not going to have you get away with any more of it.

ERIC. I just thought I might give some to Sigard, just a

few cents maybe. I guess it don't matter. I just thought a few cents . . .

AMANDA. Well, you better yust get such thoughts out of your head. You go getting him into all kinds of mischief as it is, you are. It is too bad you couldn't make yourself less trouble. What with chickens to feed and the oats-cutting coming on I got yust about all I can do . . .

ERIC (*brokenly*). I have lived too long, I guess.

AMANDA (*in anger*). Ha! You live too long. Not for yourself. Don't think it. (*Takes check and puts it stealthily in the vase on the top shelf of the cupboard.*) Every day you live is just one day longer out of . . . (*pause, lowers voice*) . . . you know where. (*Silence.*) You yust quit that everlasting nervous way of yours! (*There is a whoop from without.* AMANDA *at once changes her attitude from a militant aggression to one of con-us ion.*)

AMANDA. He's coming. (*Hurriedly looks into the coffee pot.*) Yes, it's boiling. He can have it now. (*Sets a dish of buns on the table.*) There.

CHRISTIAN (*entering*). Any coffee yet?

AMANDA (*brings the pot from the stove to the table*). Yes, yust come on and get it.

CHRISTIAN (*sitting carelessly down at one side of the table*). Any lump sugar, where's the lump sugar?

AMANDA. I'll get it.

CHRISTIAN (*taking the sugar from her*). By God, this is good coffee.

ERIC. Come, Amanda, can't I yust have a cup? It smells good. (*She does not pay any attention to him and goes on pouring out some for herself.*)

CHRISTIAN. I see that the cow with the twisted ear has cut herself somehow.

ERIC. I say, Amanda, can I have some coffee? It smells good.

CHRISTIAN (*who has not paid much attention*). The old man wants some coffee.

AMANDA. Yes.

CHRISTIAN. Well, give him some!

AMANDA. Wait till I get back from the barn first, then you can have some coffee. I can't take time, now.

CHRISTIAN. Give it to him, by God; he can have coffee around here as well as any one else.

AMANDA. He don't need it. (*Nevertheless she gives him some.*)

CHRISTIAN. Where's Sigard?

AMANDA The young wolf's not home from town yet and it's way past the time.

CHRISTIAN. He needs a beating, that's what he needs—to knock some sense into his head. Yust a good hard beating. Beating ain't such a good way but it's the only way there is. It wus what my old man did to me and I ain't so worse by it.

AMANDA. Yes, Chris, we yust must have got to do something.

CHRISTIAN. Yes, we does. You're right about that. We can't have him yust running on this way. (*Rises and wipes his mouth.*) Separator washed yet? (*He picks up the milk pails in the corner of the room.*)

AMANDA (*tying a cloth about her head*). Yes. Come on. Let's get the milking over.

ERIC. They are gone now. (*Laughs brokenly*). There they go down the path. Now yust are my time. Pretty soon, might be they will be coming back, yust all smelled up with the barn and the cows and the hay. (*He rises with difficulty and goes over to the shelves, rumaging behind the curtain.*) I hope Sigard don't come in now. I got my mind made up. It are yust the only way. What good does it do to be strong once when you are old? Now I look through a fog all day long and the things I see ain't right. They have drawn out hurt faces, and long, drawn out hurt hands. Young men can see good with their eyes, but they yust don't look. I could see once, good as any. I could make out the sail of boats a long way off over water, and I could yust mark out houses, and hills, and mountains. Now I don't see these things very much any more, because of the fog, might be. I see more. I see hard, old eyes, and no love anywhere. (*He finds what he is looking for.*) Yes, here it is. I thought it was kept in here. Yes—yes—yes. (*He takes a small bottle from the shelves and hobbles, slowly, uncertainly back to his chair. He holds it up to the light with his unsteady hands so as to be sure of the label.*) Yes, clear, clear as crystal. Don't taste bad. Not so bad. Not so bad. (*He pours some of the liquid into the cup on the arm of his chair, and goes laboriously back to the cupboard where he conceals the bottle once more.*) They say in the Bible it says it's a fine thing to live to be an old one. So it might have been once, but the world have yust changed

some since. An old one ain't got much place in the world. It are a time of winds and fogs and rain. (*Glances out the window.*) My God, it are Sigard coming home at last. (*He struggles slowly back to his chair, and pretends to be dozing.* SIGARD *enters sheepishly, tossing his hat on the floor.*)

SIGARD. Grandfather?

ERIC. Ah, Sigard, is that you, back from town?

SIGARD. Yes. It is me. Where are they, Grandfather.

ERIC. They are at the barn, Sigard. They said you better hurry with the milking now. They are not pleased that you took so long time coming back from town.

SIGARD. They have been mistreating you again, Grandfather. It won't do you any good to say they haven't because I know they have.

ERIC. They yust do not understand, Sigard. They can do lots of things, plow in the field, tend chickens, but understanding they yust do not know how to do. There is not anything like an old wisdom like mine, or a young wisdom like yours. We know.

SIGARD (*thinking it over*). Yes, I guess perhaps so. I am fourteen today, Grandfather, and they have forgotten it.

ERIC. But I didn't forget, Sigard. My pension check have come today by the mail. That yust have remind me of the time we stormed the point. That is when I got shot, Sigard. I have not known much English then. I had yust come over, it was I think, May the . . .

SIGARD (*who, during the last speech has been looking out the window, becomes alarmed*). Yes, Grandfather, I know. You have told me about that before. Wait. They are coming into the gate now, down at the end of the pasture. I am glad they have come now, while the folks are at the barn.

ERIC. Who is that, Sigard?

SIGARD. They are Mr. Hall, you know, who is Justice of the Peace, and old Reverend Ames. They are coming to see the old man about me.

ERIC. What does they want about you, Sigard?

SIGARD (*with shamed reluctance*). Oh!

ERIC. Come, Sigard, boy, don't be afraid. I am your grandfather, and I have fought for you before this time whenever you needed me, and perhaps I can do something for you now, if you need me and it is that way. Don't be afraid to tell me yust because I am old and they do not treat me well any more.

SIGARD. It is serious, Grandfather. I don't think you

could help much. I broke a window in the church. I broke it out. I did it last week, and when I saw the Reverend and the Justice coming up the road, I knew they'd found out who broke it. (*The two appear at the open door, knocking and looking in at the same time with rather embarrassed expressions.*)

ERIC. You done right to tell me, Sigard. It never do any harm to tell your grandfather. (*To the men.*) Come in, come in, ah, yust come in now a minute. Please.

AMES. Thank you. Is Mr. Lundrude about the house?

ERIC. He are yust gone to the barn now, yust a minute ago.

AMES. That is too bad. Our business is with him. When will he be back?

ERIC (*slowly*). Yes, yes; he yust went to the barn.

HALL. Then we had better go out and talk to him, don't you think, Ames.

AMES. It looks that way. Which way is the barn, out around this way?

ERIC. It are yust down the path, this way (*pointing*) but it would not be good for you to go down there. He are a violent man, Christian are. It would be much better if you talked to me a while, might be. I know what you come for. It would come to something to talk to me, might be. I ain't such an old one as I look.

AMES. Shall we talk?

HALL. Might as well. It's the money we're after.

ERIC (*catching eagerly at the word*). Money, yes, yes, money! You yust talk to me now, about the money. It will come to something, might be, talking to me.

AMES. Which one says—?

HALL. Go ahead.

AMES. No. I think it would look better if you did. Remember I am a minister of the gospel.

HALL. All right.

ERIC (*trying to follow the drift*). What's that you said?

HALL. Well, you see, Mr. Hansen, it is just this way. There has been too much delinquency among the older children of the last few months and it has got to stop: that's all. It's come to the place where it's got to stop. We are going to make an example of the mischief makers after this, but in this particular case the Reverend Mr. Ames here won't hear of the reform school. However, he does think that the window should be paid for, and that the child should be soundly punished in some way. Spare

the rod and spoil the child, you see. That is the reason we came out here to see his father.

ERIC. Yes, yes, go on. I don't hear so good, might be. Go on, yes.

HALL. Well, this is a big window, one in front of the church, and it will cost seventy dollars to replace it.

AMES. Of course, all of the window is not broken, but we wish to make this thing a lesson, and the Board feel it would be well to have a new window, done to match the decorations which the ladies have had done this spring, the retouching of the interior, you know.

ERIC. How does it come, Sigard, you broke the window?

SIGARD. Iver Lasson was fighting me. He's better at fighting than I am, and I remembered your story about when you stormed the mountain in the face of the Rebels, and how brave you were when you were young, and I picked up a rock, and threw it, and the window broke out. That's all I know. The window broke, and the big glass picture of Christ in the middle fell down on the rocks outside and broke.

AMES (*doggedly*). Well, anyway, the window is broken.

ERIC. Seventy dollars did you say yust to fix in that window again? (*He sits and muses a long time, rubbing his old, feeble hands over the arms of his chair.* SIGARD *stands aside with dropped head.*) Seventy dollars yust to fix him up.

HALL (*pulling out his watch*). Come, now, we can't stay here all night, you know. I should be home at supper right now.

ERIC. Give me a few minutes more. I think I yust be able to pay it. I think it yust will be so. (*Half rising in his chair.*) Sigard, Sigard, hurry now and come here. (*He comes to his grandfather.*) That are it, Sigard, help me up. Now. We will go over to the shelves now, might be. Yes. My pension check have come today. (SIGARD *helps him slowly across the floor.*)

ERIC. Reach up there, Sigard, on the top shelf. (SIGARD *looks.*) Find it?

SIGARD (*looking*). I can't find it.

ERIC. Look again, real good. Find it?

SIGARD. No.

ERIC. It's a yellow slip of paper with government marks on it.

SIGARD. But I can't find it.

ERIC. But it yust got to be there. He came today.

SIGARD. I looked every place.

AMES. It doesn't seem that they have any money. This seems a waste of time to me.

HALL. So it is. We should have gone out to the barn in the first place. It is always best to deal with the proper authorities in these matters, you know.

AMES (*to* HALL). Probably you are right. (*To* ERIC) Can't you find your money?

ERIC. Ja, ja, yust wait now. I think I remember. Sigard, Sigard, look in the vase on the top of the shelf. Might be it is there. (SIGARD *climbs up and gets the vase and they look eagerly into it, together.*) You yust see him there, Sigard?

SIGARD (*taking out the check.*) But this is the money father intends to get the oats cut with!

ERIC (*eagerly taking it*). Yes, yes, might be.

SIGARD. But what will he do about it? What will he do about the oats, getting them cut?

ERIC. It yust don't matter, Sigard, about the oats-cutting now. Help me back to my chair, Sigard. (*They go back slowly, and seat him again.*) There, now. Now run up the stairs fast as you can to my room. Pull back the old trunk that are standing in the corner of my room, the one with the pictures on top of it. Then pull away the mopboards that are near the corner. There are a piece loose that you will see. Might be you will find a sack inside, yust a small one. Hurry up before your father comes. He might be coming back now, any time. (SIGARD *goes out.*)

HALL. How much money have you there, Hansen?

ERIC. There are here yust thirty dollars.

HALL. And do you think you can get the rest of it?

ERIC. Might be. I don't know. It have been years since.

HALL. What do you think, Reverend? Shall we wait.

AMES. It seems only fair, now. (*They wait silently a moment. The stage has been growing darker.* AMES *moves over to the door and looks out.*) There are clouds coming up over here. I wonder if it will rain before we get back to town?

HALL Maybe. You can't tell about the weather in this country. (*Enter* SIGARD *with a small bag in his hand.*)

SIGARD (*joyfully*). I found it. It was there.

ERIC (*moved*). Bring it here, Sigard. Open it up, I yust don't see well enough. There now. Count it out, Sigard. How much money are there in it.

SIGARD (*looking closely at the coins*). There are three ten-

dollar ones, and one five-dollar one, and four dollar ones. They are all old ones.

ERIC. That are sixty-nine dollars. I have been saving up these coins ever since I wasn't much older than you are, Sigard. They are what I saved out of my first years' wages that I earned after I came over here. I thought might be they would come in handy and be needed some day. And so it have happened. I had forgot about putting them there, lately. I have forgot a great deal.

SIGARD. But won't you need them any more? You are going to give them all for me?

ERIC. Ja, Sigard, it ain't much. You are the only one who wus good to me while I wus an old one. When I wus young, I was straight and strong and had blue eyes. I had friendsbecause men wus afraid of me, and women fell in love with me because I was strong. Now that I am old, Sigard, and can't see nothing, I have learned more of wisdom than I knew then. Wisdom springs from suffering, suffering. That yust be wisdom for you, preacher!

AMES. Yes, I dare say. Suffering has many a little lesson. It is an aid to a good Christian life.

ERIC. Here are your money, all but one dollar. We haven't got no more.

HALL. But that isn't seventy dollars. (*The old man shrinks back into his chair, disappointed, letting escape his lips a little moaning sigh. An idea suddenly occurs to* SIGARD. *He dashes out of the room.*)

SIGARD. I've got it, grandfather, I've got it!

ERIC. What have you got, Sigard?

AMES. What could possibly be on the child's mind?

HALL. I couldn't say.

AMES. Perhaps we better. After all it is only a dollar, you know.

HALL. No. I want this to be an object lesson. This has got to stop.

AMES. Well, maybe you are right. We can't give them too much freedom. (SIGARD *returns with a savings bank from which he manages to jimmy a quantity of change.*)

AMES. Really, is the lad doing right by taking money out of that bank? I question the ethics of such conduct!

ERIC. Ja, ja, it wus his bank. (*To* SIGARD.) Do that make up the right amount, Sigard?

SIGARD (*with joy*). It is . . . All of it now. Give it to them. Let them take it.

ERIC. Here it are. Take it now, every cent of it!

AMES. Thank you very much. (*Takes the money and pockets it. The two move toward the door.* AMES *stops and looks back.*) Won't you come out to church some time, Mr. Hansen? Good afternoon. (*They go out.*)

ERIC (*bitterly*). Ja, ja, they better hurry. They might get wet with the rain.

SIGARD (*relieved*). They are gone!

ERIC (*thoughtfully*). Ja, Sigard, they wus gone. And I saved up that money all my life for yust this. (*To* SIGARD.) Don't say anything about all these to your father, Sigard. I'll fix it up. Better run on out to the barn, now. He is in a bad temper. You better hurry up quick.

SIGARD. But what will father and mother do about the check we took? It will be terrible for us. We can't tell them anything. What will they do?

ERIC. Don't you worry no more, Sigard. They won't storm this time. I have a plan that will fix that up. Run along, now, and don't lose no time. (*The darkness has deepened and there is a wind.*)

CHRISTIAN'S VOICE (*from without*). Sigard! Sigard! Hi! Is Sigard in there!

ERIC. Run along, quick! He's coming.

SIGARD. Yes, father, coming!

CHRISTIAN'S VOICE. Bring our coats, then! It is going to rain. Be quick! (*A sudden sound of wind.*)

ERIC (*suddenly looking out of the window*). Sigard, Sigard, Come. Look. There is a wind. Hear it? See the mountain out across there. You yust have eyes and can see. I can't see, but I can remember them getting black when the storm comes. Over there, Sigard, the wind goes moaning in the pines. They are strong, big straight trees, Sigard, but I have seen the wind break them, big strong, pines . . . You cannot see the wind.

SIGARD (*with an arm full of coats*). Yes, grandfather, but I got to go.

CHRISTIAN'S VOICE. Sigard!

SIGARD (*going out*). Goodby, grandfather!

ERIC. Goodby, Sigard.

ERIC (*taking up the cup and looking at it*). It are yust

strange. It are a funny thing to live and die this way, it are funny. (*Drinks suddenly from the cup, shudders with a fit of revolt.*) We are young, and straight like pines, and we are strong, and our eyes are yust as blue as blue, but then we get old, by and by, might be, and a grey fog settles down over them. Funny thing. Funny. It are yust only when the fog come over them that we really learn to see. But it doesn't matter no more. The wind breaks us . . . yust a little thing like the wind. (*The poison takes effect, he writhes painfully a few minutes, slips from his chair to the floor.*)

The pines . . . are broken . . . on . . . the mountain . . .

CURTAIN

WHAT I LOVE

BY ESMEE DE MENOCAL*

The morning sunshine on the beach; the green grass and red roses and white daisies.
The golden hair of children; white dresses; the shops full of candies; and my dear Mother.
The blue eyes of babies and the white snow-flakes that fall on me.
The nice books that I have read.
Sailing on the sea.
And when I have been good; when I am white and clean like snow, new clothes.
Dear little puppies.
All colors, especially gold—the gold in the mines.
And little poems like "When I was down beside the sea."
My dear home and my whole family.
And the bells of the steeple.

*This poem was written in 1929, without any assistance or subsequent correction by her elders, when the author was ten years old.

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